



Auditor General
MANITOBA

Report to the Legislative Assembly

Archives of Manitoba: Preservation and Access to Records

Independent Assurance Report

WEBSITE VERSION



February 2024

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February 2024

Honourable Tom Lindsey
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Room 244, Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is an honour to submit my report, titled *Archives of Manitoba: Preservation and Access to Records*, to be laid before Members of the Legislative Assembly in accordance with the provisions of Section 28 of *The Auditor General Act*.

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by:

Tyson Shtykalo, CPA, CA
Auditor General

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Auditor General's comments

Records held by the Archives of Manitoba (the Archives) trace the history of this province, from the Hudson's Bay Company records to present day. These records are an invaluable resource for all Manitobans—they help us understand our past and shape our future.

Given the value of these records, we wanted to determine if the Archives was fulfilling its legislated responsibilities. We found significant risks regarding the protection and preservation of records. We also found the Archives was not providing access to digital records, only physical records.

While all public servants have a responsibility for recordkeeping, the Archives has an oversight role. However, we found the Archives had no process to ensure records were transferred to its care and had not established and communicated a formal recordkeeping policy. Such a policy would help ensure public servants have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

We found demand from departments and government agencies for recordkeeping advice and guidance was increasing. At the same time, uptake for recordkeeping training was low. This needs to be addressed. The risk of records not being properly captured and retained is reduced when all staff have a clear understanding on what should be archived. This then helps improve government transparency and accountability to the public.

In an increasingly digital society, the Archives must also acquire and protect digital records. Unfortunately, we found the Archives did not have the capability to acquire, protect, preserve, and provide access to digital archival records. These records are currently retained by government departments and agencies, making them inaccessible through Archives.

It is also essential that the Archives protects the records already in its care. We found the Archives needed to upgrade its physical and environmental protection systems.

I would like to thank the Archives' management and staff and the many other stakeholders we met with during our audit for their cooperation and assistance. I would also like to thank my audit team for their efforts.

Original Signed by:

Tyson Shtykalo, CPA, CA
Auditor General



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Report highlights

Why we did this audit

The Archives of Manitoba (the Archives) is responsible for the retention and preservation of significant documents and records related to Manitoba and its history.

When records are not identified, or properly protected and preserved, the information they contain can be permanently lost for future generations.

We wanted to determine whether the Archives is:

- Fulfilling its legislated responsibilities related to the creation, acquisition, and preservation of records.
- Facilitating access to archival records.

Conclusion

We found the Archives is:

- Partially fulfilling its legislated responsibilities, but could do more to ensure that records in its care are protected and preserved.
- Facilitating access to physical archival records, but not digital records.

This audit includes

10 RECOMMENDATIONS.

What we found

Recordkeeping policy

A formal recordkeeping policy is needed to address gaps.

- The Archivist of Manitoba is responsible for establishing policies, standards, and guidelines for recordkeeping.
- While some work has been done, there are no formal policies or standards in place.
- There are gaps in oversight responsibilities.

Recordkeeping training

Uptake for training is low despite an increase in demand.

- The demand for advice and guidance from public servants performing recordkeeping duties is increasing.
- Despite this, only a small percentage of public servants have taken the training.
- More training for individuals involved in recordkeeping needs to be offered.

Records schedules

Record Schedules are approved as required.

- Records Schedules are documents used by the Archives to manage records, from creation until final disposition.
- The Archives approves these Records Schedules as required and identifies archival records of value.

Protection and preservation of records

Risks to the protection and preservation of records need to be addressed.

- The Archives has limited storage space for physical records.
- The Archives does not have the capability to store digital records.
- The Archives does not verify the contents of records transferred into its care.
- Standards for protection and preservation have not been formalized.
- Risks to the protection of records have been identified but not fully mitigated.
- Preservation of records follows best practices.

Access to records

Access to records is limited.

- The Archives could do more to facilitate in-person access to records, including expanding its hours of operations.
- Access to records in digital format is limited.

Background

The Archives of Manitoba (the Archives), a branch within the Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage, and Tourism, is responsible for the retention and preservation of significant documents and **records** related to Manitoba and its history. This includes the records of the Manitoba Government but also the archives of the Hudson Bay Company (HBC), and records such as those of significant Manitobans, families, and organizations.

The Archives is mandated “to preserve the archival records of the government and its agencies, the courts and the legislature.” Its mission is to protect information important to community identities and the knowledge of individuals and groups. By doing so, the Archives promotes government transparency and accountability, as decisions, rights and entitlements are documented in the records.

The Archives also has a role to play in reconciliation. Two of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Actions were directed at provincial archives and other calls to action may benefit from the archives' support. The Hudsons Bay Company Archives (HBCA) has the records of the HBC's contacts with Indigenous people and is a source of important historical information.

The Archives operates from 2 locations:

- The Archives of Manitoba building, located in downtown Winnipeg. This location houses the Archives Research Room, as well as storage vaults for the preservation and protection of archival records, a conservation laboratory, and offices for Archive staff.
- The Government Records Centre. This is a secure storage facility which provides space for storage of semi-active records, as well as an archival storage vault.

Within the Archives, there are 4 units:

- The Government Records Office (GRO) helps departments and agencies understand their records management responsibilities and meet their obligations under *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the ARA). The GRO also designs procedures, oversees record storage, and ensures access to this information while in storage.
- The Government and Private Sector Archives (GPSA) is responsible for the archival records of the Manitoba Government as well as records of the Manitoba private sector, municipalities, and school districts/divisions.
- The Hudson Bay Company Archives (HBCA) acquires and preserves archival records of HBC and other records related to HBC history, and encourages the use and understanding of these records.

A **record** is data or information created or received by an organization in the course of its activities and used as an extension of human memory or to support accountability.

Stabilization is the minimal actions taken to enable records to be used in their original forms for as long as possible.

- Preservations Services recommends, manages, and carries out activities related to the conservation and preservation of records, including records **stabilization** and repairs, environmental monitoring and collections storage.

As of March 2023, the Archives held:

- 54,000 linear metres of mainly written or printed records.
- Over 1.1 million graphic items (such as photos).
- 134,000 maps.
- 27,000 hours of audio-visual materials (sound, film, and TV recordings).

In 2022/23, 1,314 linear metres of non-digital records (1,248 metres of government records and 66 metres of private records) were brought into custody.

Legislation

The Archives and Recordkeeping Act (the ARA) states the purposes of the Archives are to:

- Provide for the identification and preservation of records of archival value to present and future generations.
- Promote and facilitate good recordkeeping respecting government records in order to support accountability and effective government administration.
- Make archival records known by means of promotion, publication, exhibition, or loan and to facilitate access to them, in accordance with any rights of access provided by law, in legislation or by the terms or conditions of an agreement.
- Encourage and assist other organizations in good recordkeeping practices.
- Encourage and assist archival activities and the archival community.

Recordkeeping is the entire range of functions involved in creating and managing records and information throughout their life cycle.

It includes:

- Creating and capturing records
- Organizing and using records
- Protecting and managing records
- Retaining and disposing of records

Recordkeeping also includes the policies, procedures, and systems used in the management of records.

Responsibilities for recordkeeping

The Archivist of Manitoba is responsible for the operations of the Archives and has specific responsibilities under the ARA. These include developing policies, standards, and guidelines for **recordkeeping**, and protecting and preserving records.

The Archives and government departments and agencies have specific responsibilities related to recordkeeping, including the creation and capture of records, records scheduling, and protection of records. However, we identified gaps in the performance of these responsibilities. This is discussed further in **SECTION 1.2**.

The recordkeeping life cycle

Records are the basis of any archive and provide reliable evidence of, and information about, who, what, when, and why something happened. It is the responsibility of government departments, groups, or individuals to maintain records, which may include keeping records for:

- Providing evidence of an activity or decision, policy, or service provided.
- Ensuring program accountability and provide information for ongoing business needs.
- Meeting financial, audit, legal, or operational requirements.

Records have a life cycle (FIGURE 1); they are created or received, need to be maintained, and are ultimately preserved or disposed of at the end of their useful life. The Archives is involved, either directly or indirectly, in all of these stages.

The Archives is not directly involved with the day-to-day aspects of recordkeeping, but it does provide guidance and direction to those who do this work. It can also provide guidance to others outside of government.

The Archives stores records that are not in active daily use, but may occasionally need to be referred to (also called semi-active storage).

Once records are no longer required for use, they are disposed of by the Archives through one of 2 methods:

- Destruction: Disposal by a process that results in the record being destroyed, such as shredding or burning of **analogue records**, or deletion or overwriting of digital records.
- Archiving: The identification, selection, and preservation of records that are no longer needed for day-to-day use, but are considered to have continuing value to government or society.

Funding

During the period under audit, the Archives received an annual budget of approximately \$2.7 million, including \$700,000 from the Hudson's Bay Company Foundation to pay for archival staff caring for the HBC Archives. The majority of the expenses in 2022/23 (87%) were for staff salaries and benefits for nearly 38 full-time equivalents (FTEs). The balance of the funding was for other operational expenses such as materials, supplies, and equipment. The Archives recovered 13% of its expenses from departments for costs related to records storage, and from Special Operating Agencies and agencies for record storage, retrieval, and destruction.

Figure 1: The recordkeeping life cycle



Source: Archives of Manitoba

An **analogue record** is any record which is not stored digitally, and could include records on paper, microfilm, or even clay tablets, as well as a record stored on non-digital electronic tape, disc, or wire. Analogue records may also be called physical records.

Objectives

Our objectives were to determine whether the Archives of Manitoba:

- Is fulfilling its legislated responsibilities related to the creation, acquisition, and preservation of records.
- Is facilitating access to archival records.

Scope and approach

The audit examined the processes and procedures used by the Archives of Manitoba to promote recordkeeping, preserve and protect records in its care, and how the Archives promotes accessibility to those records.

We did not assess if departments and agencies are fulfilling their duties and responsibilities under *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the ARA). We did not assess departments' internal recordkeeping processes or the retrieval of records by government departments.

As part of our audit work, we

- Interviewed Archives of Manitoba staff.
- Surveyed government employees with a role in recordkeeping.
- Examined and analyzed existing central government and departmental policies and practices, information systems, reports, and correspondence provided by government.
- Reviewed accessibility to archives in other jurisdictions.
- Chose representative samples to assess the Archives' practices and allow us to conclude against our criteria:
- Chose a judgmental, random sample of 6 months of Archives Research Room retrieval slips to assess if access to the record was appropriately granted.
 - We also selected a representational sample of record entries from the retrieval slips reviewed above, to ensure that any access restriction identified in the Keystone database was consistent with the restriction identified by Archives' staff and noted on the retrieval slip.
- Documented processes and activities used by the Archives of Manitoba.

Audit criteria

To determine whether the Archives of Manitoba is fulfilling its legislated responsibilities related to the creation, acquisition, and preservation of records we used the following criteria:

Criteria	Sources
1.1 Archives has appropriate policies and standards for government recordkeeping.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i> International Standards Organization (ISO) recordkeeping standards
1.2 Archives provides government body staff guidance and training on recordkeeping.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i>
1.3 Archives identifies records with archival value and takes them into their care.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i>
1.4 Archives protects and preserves records in its care.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i> Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice. Canadian Conservation Institute: Preventive Conservation Guidelines for Collections.

To determine whether the Archives of Manitoba is fulfilling its legislated responsibilities related to providing access to archival records we used the following criteria:

Criteria	Sources
2.1 Archives facilitates in-person access to archival records.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i>
2.2 Archives facilitates online access to archival material.	<i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i>

Archives of Manitoba partially fulfilling its responsibilities for record creation, acquisition, and preservation, but no access to digital records

The Archives of Manitoba (the Archives) is responsible for the care and management of government and other records of archival value. It is the main resource for promoting and facilitating good recordkeeping by government to support accountability and effective government administration. It is also responsible for promoting these records to the public, and facilitating access to them.

We wanted to determine if the Archives has processes to protect, preserve, and provide access to records in its care. We concluded that the Archives is partially fulfilling its legislated responsibilities related to the creation, acquisition and preservation of records. It facilitates access to archival records in paper format but not digital records. We based our conclusion on the following findings:

- Recordkeeping framework is not a formal policy (**SECTION 1**).
- Low uptake in training despite increase in demand (**SECTION 2**).
- Records Schedules approved as required (**SECTION 3**).
- Significant risks regarding the protection and preservation of records (**SECTION 4**).
- Some limitations to access of records, especially digital (**SECTION 5**).

1 Recordkeeping framework is not a formal policy

Recordkeeping provides reliable evidence of and information about who, what, when, and why something happened. Good recordkeeping by government supports public accountability and enables the Archives to preserve government records of lasting significance. *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the ARA) states that the Archivist of Manitoba must establish policies, standards, and guidelines for recordkeeping. We found there were no standard or policy for recordkeeping, and there were gaps in oversight responsibilities.

1.1 No standard or policy for recordkeeping

Archives has not created **formal standards** or policies for recordkeeping. Instead, it has developed the Records and Information Management (RIM) Framework, which provides 3 high-level principles and corresponding requirements for effective records and information management. This covers both analogue and digital records.

The guidance created by the Archives is discussed in **SECTION 2**.

Formal standards include identification of the policies and processes adopted as "official" policies, and identification that management has formally approved and communicated their use.

The International Standards Organization (ISO) has established standards for recordkeeping. These standards have been developed by experts and are considered to be industry best practices. We reviewed the Archives' RIM Framework and other recordkeeping guidance to determine if they aligned with relevant ISO standards and found them to be in alignment.

An approved policy provides users with clear objectives, roles and responsibilities, identifies desired results and any consequences for non-compliance. Having a policy also enhances governance and accountability.



Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Archives formalize the Records and Information Management Framework as the policy on recordkeeping in the Government of Manitoba.

1.2 Gaps in oversight responsibilities for recordkeeping

The General Manual of Administration (GMA) and *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the ARA) identify specific responsibilities related to recordkeeping for the Archives and provincial departments and agencies (TABLE 1).

Table 1: The General Manual of Administration (GMA) and <i>The Archives and Recordkeeping Act</i> (the ARA) identify specific responsibilities for recordkeeping	
Archives of Manitoba	Departments and agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting policies, standards, and guidelines for government recordkeeping that meet international standards and best practices. (the ARA / GMA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating records, and ensuring records they create or receive are kept in a formal recordkeeping system. (GMA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting and facilitating good government recordkeeping. (the ARA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assigning responsibility for the management of records. Having processes and systems in place to support recordkeeping. (GMA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing advice to government organizations on preparation and approval of Records Schedules. (the ARA / GMA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing Records Schedules for government records, and ensuring these records are retained and disposed of according to the approved schedules. (the ARA / GMA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying records which have continuing value to government or society for permanent preservation. (the ARA / GMA) 	

Sources: *General Manual of Administration*, *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act*

We found that there were gaps in oversight created by this division of responsibilities outlined in the table above.

- The Archives has the **Compass** process. Departments can use this tool to verify that their recordkeeping activities are consistent with the Archives' RIM Framework. However, the Archives does not check that departments or agencies use it.
- The Archives does not have a process to ensure that **Records Schedules** are current. Once a Records Schedule is signed off by the Archivist, there is no further review by the Archives (**SEE EXAMPLE 1**).
- The Archives does not have a process to ensure that all records are being transferred into its care. Archives management stated that they are aware of what records should be created (as identified by the Records Schedule), but do not know if this creation has actually occurred until the records are transferred to the Archives' care. This may result in these records being inaccessible if they are archival records and have already reached the disposition date (**SEE EXAMPLES 1 AND 2 TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THIS PROCESS GAP**).

Compass is a capacity assessment tool that is designed to help departments evaluate and strengthen recordkeeping capacity.

A **Records Schedule** is a formal plan that identifies specific government records, establish how long they should be retained, and if they should be destroyed or archived. The creation of Records Schedules is legislated by the ARA.

Example 1: Old Records Schedules were not updated

In 2021, the Archives was notified that a Special Operating Agency (SOA) of the government was being shut down and records were going to be transferred to Archives.

A review by the Government Records Office (GRO) of the program's existing Records Schedules noted that a revision was required, as the disposition status of records was to be changed from "archive" to "destroy."

Archives staff also noted that no board minutes for the program had ever been transferred to the Archives, despite there being a separate Records Schedule for them. The program had been a SOA of the government in 1996.

Example 2: Missing Records Schedules for Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Starting in 2016, the GRO initiated a project to ensure Records Schedules were updated. With each change in government or cabinet-shuffle, the GRO reaches out to all Deputy Ministers' and Ministers' offices to ensure that their Records Schedules are current. In the audit period, this included work on revising or creating Records Schedules allowing for the disposal of documents that are not considered official records (transitory papers).

The ARA allows Archives to impose a penalty of up to \$50,000 for anyone who has:

- Destroyed,
- Removed information from,
- Removed or concealed a government record, or
- Encouraged or caused someone to do any of the above.

We found that Archives has never imposed a penalty for destruction or removal of government records. Archives management told us they have no way of identifying if records were destroyed unless someone provided them with this information.

There is an expectation under the ARA that the identification and preservation of records of archival value will take place. The gaps in oversight responsibilities increases the risk that recordkeeping tasks do not occur and records are not preserved. The gaps also result in information that is inaccessible to the public. This risk is considerable when coupled with the responses provided by participants in our survey on recordkeeping knowledge and training (**SEE SECTION 2**).



Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Archives develop a proactive outreach program to meet annually with department officials to discuss recordkeeping responsibilities, updates and emerging issues.

2 Low uptake in training despite increase in demand

The process the Archives has put in place for recordkeeping requires active participation from all those involved in the creation of records. For good recordkeeping, individuals should be aware of their role and responsibilities. We found the demand for recordkeeping advice and guidance is increasing, and that recordkeeping training has low uptake and needs to expand.

2.1 Demand for recordkeeping advice and guidance is increasing

The Government Records Office (GRO) within the Archives of Manitoba is responsible for the development of recordkeeping guidance. This guidance is publicly available on the Archives' website. It covers a range of topics: from an overall framework for recordkeeping to specific subjects, such as digitizing records or determining how long records should be kept.

Departments and agencies can contact the GRO for advice and assistance on recordkeeping. The number of contacts from departments and agencies has been increasing; from 1,419 contacts in 2014/15 to 2,156 in 2022/23. Archives' management stated that the time spent on responding to these contacts is challenging their ability to complete other work.

The Archives does not track the topics of these requests. However, the questions and responses are documented by the GRO in the client advisory files. This information is sometimes used as the basis of formal guidance development, or more informally, as subjects of discussion for the GRO's *Outside the Box* blog posts. A more fulsome analysis of these questions could identify areas where additional guidance and formal training is required.

We surveyed the 67 department and agency employees identified as Records Officers (ROs), and the 10 Executive Financial Officers (EFOs). These employees have specific responsibilities or roles in recordkeeping. We received responses from 51% of ROs and 20% of the EFOs.

Table 2: Almost all Records Officers and EFOs knew and used recordkeeping guidance

Survey question	Yes	No
RO/ EFO aware of recordkeeping guidance?	97%	3%
RO/ EFO have used recordkeeping guidance?	91%	9%
Recordkeeping guidance provided required information?	87%	13%

Source: OAG survey of ROs and EFOs – March 2022

Survey respondents who identified the guidance did not provide the required information, indicated that:

- The information provided was too generic.
- The guidance did not provide the information for their specific situation, or
- There was too much material to read.

Respondents to the survey also identified examples where transfers were rejected by the GRO for incorrect dates. We noted other issues during our testing of a sample of transfers to storage which could be due to a lack of clear guidance. We identified 9 transfers from 6 departments where the disposition date was incorrect. This appears to signal that the calculation of the disposition date, as explained in the records transfer procedure provided by the Archives, is not well understood.

2.2 Recordkeeping training has low uptake

In April 2020, the Archives introduced online training on record information management to help government employees “identify government records, understand (their) responsibilities as a public servant, and recognize how records are managed in the Manitoba government.”

The training is available to all employees of the core government. It is not mandatory for government employees. Between the period April 1, 2020 to August 31, 2022, 1,598 individuals took the Records and Information Management (RIM) training. This represented only 6.4% of the total Public Service (at that time).

The online course is not available to employees without access to the Government of Manitoba’s intranet (such as Crown corporations and some agencies). Instead, these employees can access a voice-over slide show version of the course hosted on the Archives’ YouTube channel. Employees that view the course on the YouTube channel cannot be tracked by the Archives. The Archives obtains statistics for the number of YouTube views, but it does not provide information on how many views were from public servants.

The RIM Framework identifies that responsibility for recordkeeping is to be communicated from the top down to management. However, it does not define who is considered senior management.

We reviewed the participant lists to determine how many Records Officers (ROs) and Executive Financial Officers (EFOs) had taken the RIM training course (**SEE TABLE 3**) and found that few had.

Table 3: Few Records Officers and Executive Financial Officers have taken the RIM training course

	Total individuals	Total individuals taken RIM training	%
Records Officers	67	16	24%
Executive Financial Officers	10	1	10%

Source: OAG analysis of OSD supplied training lists April 1, 2020 to August 31, 2022

We also surveyed the 67 ROs and 10 EFOs and asked what training on recordkeeping they had received. Of the 34 responses received, 8 (24%) identified they had not had any recordkeeping training (RIM or otherwise). Further, 12 (35%) of respondents indicated training received did not prepare them for their role, many noting it was “too general.” The majority (26 individuals – or 76%) of survey respondents gave suggestions for additional detailed training or online resources. For example, several individuals identified a desire for detailed training on creating or amending Records Schedules.

Training and guidance are important to ensure that recordkeeping is being done well. If records are not capturing the needed information, it may result in a lack of accountability and transparency. Poor recordkeeping systems may result in records that cannot be located due to poor identification of the content. The result is a loss of information for future generations.



Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Archives:

- a. Work with appropriate parties to increase participation in record-keeping training.
- b. Develop training and guidance materials based on common issues, requests, questions and needs identified by those involved with records management.

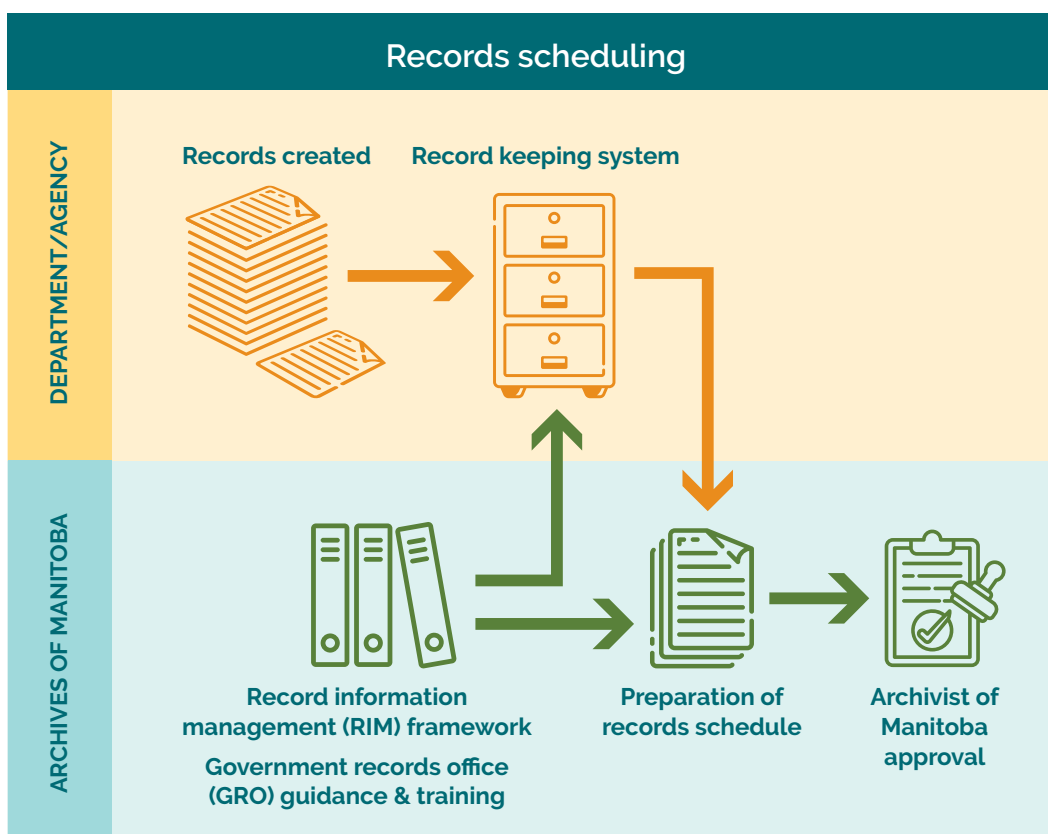
3 Records Schedules approved as required

Records Schedules (RS) are documents used by the Archives to manage a department's or agency's records, from creation until final disposition. They outline which records have archival value, how long they should be retained, and which should be destroyed once the retention period is up. Preparation of a RS is the department or agency's responsibility, but there is an expectation that this is done in consultation with Archives staff.

3.1 Records of archival value identified

The Archives and Recordkeeping Act (the ARA) defines records of archival value as those which have a lasting significance to the government or society. The ARA identifies that the Archives has the responsibility for preserving and protecting archival records. Archives staff make the decision on whether a record has archival value. This decision is made during the preparation of a Records Schedule.

Figure 2: Records Schedules are prepared by the department, but Archives assists and approves them



Source: OAG, based on information from the Archives of Manitoba

We reviewed a representative sample of 45 Records Schedules approved between April 1, 2020 and August 31, 2022 to assess if the Archives documented if the records had archival value. We found that all 45 records schedules identified the eventual disposition of the records.

3.2 Records Schedules were approved

A Records Schedule is required for all records created by a government department or agency. School divisions, municipalities, and Regional Health Authorities are not government bodies or considered designated agencies under the ARA. They are responsible for their own records management. However, many municipalities and school divisions have chosen the Archives to safeguard their records.

The ARA identifies specific requirements and information that Records Schedules must contain. We assessed the Records Schedule template in use, and found that the information requested was consistent with the legislated requirements.

All Records Schedules must be approved by the Archivist of Manitoba. Once the Records Schedule has been signed by the Archivist, all records listed as part of that schedule must be handled according to the retention and disposition requirements. We reviewed a representational sample of 45 Records Schedules approved between April 1, 2020 and August 31, 2022 to assess if the Archives approved records schedules in accordance with the Act. All 45 had been approved by the Archivist.

4 Significant risks regarding the protection and preservation of records

The preamble to the *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the ARA) states that “the preservation of records of archival value is a unique and priceless gift of one generation of Manitobans to another,” and that “good recordkeeping by government supports accountability to the public and enables the preservation by the Archives of Manitoba of government records of lasting significance.” To accomplish this, the ARA requires that archival records be protected and preserved. We found that the Archives had limited space for storing physical records and no capability to store digital records.

4.1 Limited space for physical storage of records

The ARA identifies that the Archives can provide storage space for government records, as well as take archival records into its care. The Archives has the Government Records Centre (GRC) where it stores non-digital records. This is a leased space in a secure facility.

In 2022, the Archives identified that space at the GRC for physical storage of **semi-active** and archival records was limited and they were close to capacity, and that an increase in the storage space at the GRC was needed. The lease for the GRC expired Jan. 31, 2023. Subsequent to our field work, the government negotiated a new 10-year lease to January 31, 2033, but without any plans for expansion.

Insufficient storage space increases the risk that records are exposed to damage or loss. A lack of archival storage space may also impair accessibility to those records.

Semi-active records: Records which are no longer in use by the organization, but have not reached the disposition date and may be needed at a future date.

4.2 No capability to preserve digital records

The Government of Manitoba has been shifting to using digital or online records. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to work remotely, record creation was increasingly in digital formats.

The Archives does not have the capability to acquire, protect, preserve, and provide access to digital archival records (known as a Digital Preservation System [DPS]). Archives management confirmed they were in the midst of a scoping project for a DPS.

Digital records are records created, recorded, transmitted or stored in digital form by electronic, optical, magnetic or other, similar means.

Until a DPS is in place, Departments are responsible for maintaining **digital records** they have created. This means that archival digital records retained by the department or agency cannot be accessed through the Archives. There is also the risk that the information format or storage media will become obsolete, resulting in the further loss of information.

The Archives should also consider **RECOMMENDATION 10** in conjunction with this recommendation to ensure accessibility to digital archival records.



Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Archives implement a digital preservation system to acquire, protect, preserve and facilitate access to digital archival records.

4.3 Transfer into care of non-digital records does not include content verification

When a government record is no longer in use by the organization, but may be needed at a future date, it is transferred to the Government Records Centre (GRC). The GRC provides centralized records storage, retrieval and destruction services for all government departments and agencies. We found that the Archives transferred analogue records into their care, but did not verify the content of these records.

Transfers into the GRC

We selected a representational sample of 67 transfers into storage at the GRC to assess if the transfer form was accurately filled out and record information was accurately recorded in the Archives' database. All 67 files complied with the transfer process, with minor errors such as incorrect disposition dates noted. The description of the transfer also matched information in the tracking database, with one error in location for a box of records observed.

We found that the Archives staff did not verify that the records described on the transfer matched the records actually transferred. As we found in sampling access to records in **SECTION 5.1.2**, this has resulted

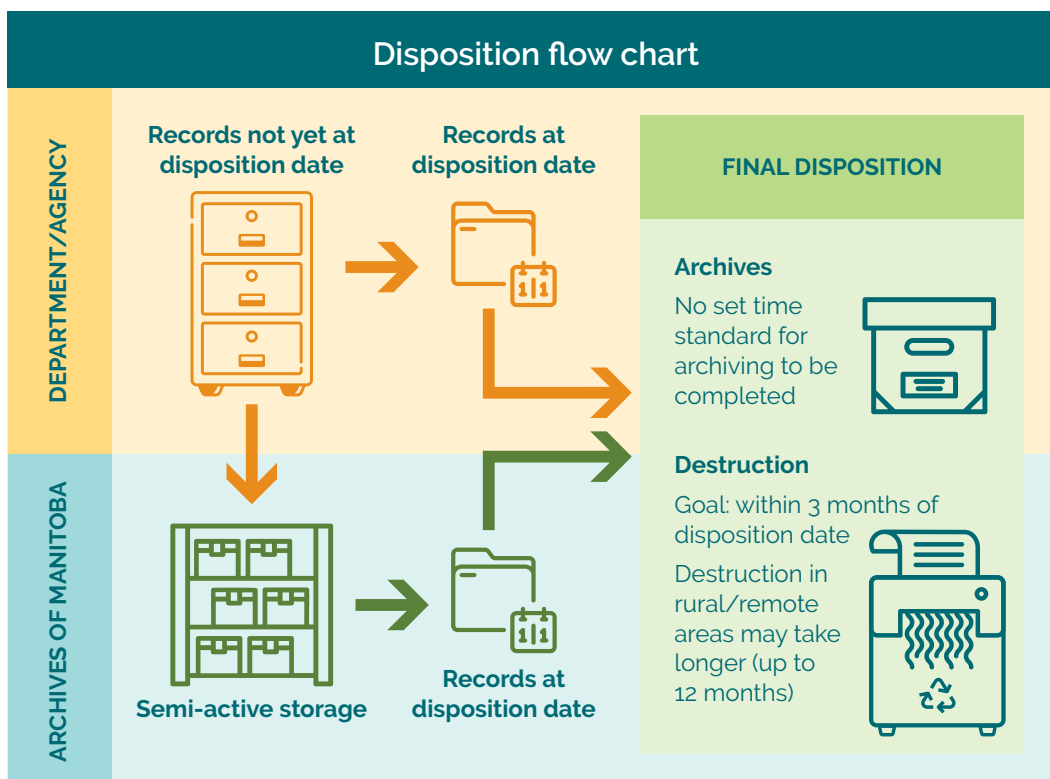
in the storage of empty files. This potentially inefficient use of physical storage may be an unintended contributor to Archives' space challenges noted in **SECTION 4.1**.



Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Archives perform random spot checks of non-digital transfers to ensure that the description matches the physical records.

Figure 3: Records are transferred into semi-active storage, or directly for destruction or archival storage



Source: OAG, based on information from the Archives of Manitoba

Transfer to destruction or archival care

As noted in **FIGURE 3**, Archives' goal is that records are to be destroyed within 3 months of the end of the retention period. Exceptions to this may occur, including:

- Records which are transferred to the GRC for immediate disposal.
- Records which could not be destroyed for legal or other reasons at the time they reach their disposition date.
- Organizations outside Winnipeg destroying their records locally instead of transferring them to the GRC.

We reviewed a representational sample of 67 transfers from storage of records which reached the end of the retention period; of these, 8 were sent to archives and 59 were destroyed.

The results of our review of the 59 files sent for destruction were:

Table 4: The majority of records were destroyed within Archives' time standard			
Location	Record pulled and destroyed within 3 months	Destroyed after 3 months, but within the year	Destruction of records
Destroyed by GRC	66%	25%	92%
Destroyed locally	5%	3%	8 %

Source: OAG review of information from the Archives of Manitoba

All records were certified as being properly destroyed by the contractor or agency.

The Archives' **Keystone database** is the main tool clients use to identify archival records. It is accessible online at the Archives' website. At the time of our audit, there were over 1.0 M entries in this database

The Archives does not have a set time period for transfers to archival care to be completed. As a result, we could not assess if the transfers to archival care occurred in a timely way. However, we found all 8 records sent to archives were transferred within 30 days, and all information on the transfers was entered accurately into the **Keystone database**. One record was not "live" (the entry was not publicly accessible) in Keystone due to additional work required to prepare them to allow the public to physically access them.

4.4 Standards for protection and preservation are not formalized

The Archivist of Manitoba is responsible for establishing standards and guidelines for recordkeeping, including for custody and protection of records. We found that the Archives does not have its own formal standards.

The Archives uses the recommended temperature and Relative Humidity settings suggested by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) for storage, and best practices for preservation techniques identified by the CCI.

Formal standards provide clear expectations for performance and the minimum requirements for the protection and preservation of records. Identifying the position or group that has responsibility for reviewing and updating the standards is also important to ensure they remain current with best practices.



Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Archives formalize the protection and preservation practices currently in use.

4.5 Risks to protection of archival records identified, but not fully mitigated

The Archives has not performed a comprehensive risk assessment of threats to archival records in its care. The Archives management told us that they use the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) risk model. This model identifies 10 specific agents of deterioration that pose a threat to Canadian Heritage collections, such as fire, water, pollution, theft and vandalism, and light exposure.

We reviewed this model and identified potential risks and how Archives is mitigating them. We found that certain risks remain unmitigated. These included:

- A lack of fire suppression systems throughout the building.
- Leakage of water into storage spaces.
- Black dust particles produced by the HVAC system that are deposited in shelves and objects in the storage vaults.

These risks relate to the buildings and their systems, which are managed by the Government of Manitoba. At the time of our audit, these risks remain unresolved.

4.5.1 Desired environmental settings in place, but aging infrastructure

The Archives follows the CCI's *Guidelines for Humidity and Temperature for Canadian Archives* for its temperature and Relative Humidity (RH) settings. We compared the desired vault settings in use at the Archives to those suggested by 2 other Archival organizations, UNESCO, and the U.S. National Archives. We found the Archives' environmental settings to be consistent, and sometimes exceeded, those of the CCI, UNESCO, and U.S. National Archives.

We obtained daily temperature and RH data from all vaults from April 1, 2020 to August 31, 2022, and compared the maximum and minimum temperatures and RH recorded to the desired vault settings; 63 incidents where the temperature or RH was higher or lower were identified. Of these:

- Fifty were minor in nature, and within the guidelines of what the Archives considers to be acceptable.
- Thirteen required action to correct the issue. Almost all (12 out of 13) of these deviations were caused by mechanical issues with the HVAC units that control temperature and RH in the vaults. The repair was usually made within one business day. The remaining one incident was due to human error which was quickly resolved.

The Archives management identified that a request to start planning for new HVAC equipment at 200 Vaughan Street had been made as far back as 2001. During the spring of 2022, meetings were held to discuss replacement. As of March 2023, the Archives' management has not been advised of any action being taken by building management to replace the equipment. Management stated that funds continued to be spent on repairing equipment that is out of date.

The Archives has made several requests related to aging and deficient building infrastructure. These remain unanswered at the time of our audit, putting Archive's legislated requirement to protect and preserve records at risk.



Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Archives review previously identified risks and implement a long-term asset replacement plan for the building(s) and infrastructure that store archival records.

4.6 Preservation of records follows best practices

The preservation of records is necessary to ensure that they remain available for future generations. Methods of preservation vary, from simply moving records into a protective housing or cleaning off mould spores and dust, to major treatments to repair damage.

We found that the Archives did not have specific preservation standards, but did use best practices for preserving records recommended by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI). Preservation Services, the unit within the Archives responsible for preservation and conservation, has some specific policies and procedures. These policies cover topics from storing records, or for standard preservation practices such as treating mould.

The Archives' conservation staff also told us that they follow the Code of Ethics and Guidance for practice (the Code) developed by the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property and the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators. The Code identifies the need to balance preservation efforts with the need to use the record, and make minimal changes to the record when preserving it. Staff told us they stay current through ongoing education and reading of professional journals. Preservation practices and techniques are updated to reflect new knowledge and technologies as needed, but "the basic principles of preservation don't change very much."

Records requiring preservation work are identified by Archival staff. Preservation Services maintains a log of these records and the issue(s) to be treated. To determine if preservation was occurring in accordance with recognized best practices, we reviewed all 7 major treatments, and a representational sample of 62 minor treatments, rehousing, and relocations, that were performed between April 1, 2018 and August 31, 2022.

- All major treatments had treatment plans prepared.
- All major treatment proposals were documented, and the work done followed the treatment plan. However, there were minor documentation errors, such as not identifying who was doing the treatment or if treatment was approved.
- Minor treatments were documented in a treatment log. All minor treatments performed were consistent with the technique or best practice identified by the CCI or AIC

Formal standards provide clear expectations for the approved process and procedures to be used for the preservation of records, and prevent the use of processes or techniques which may damage records.

RECOMMENDATION 6 identifies the need to formalize the standards used by the Archives.

5 Some limitations to access of records, especially digital

5.1 The Archives of Manitoba could do more to facilitate in-person access

Good recordkeeping by government supports accountability to the public. If information is not easily accessible, transparency and accountability are compromised. The Archives plays an important role as the stewards of records with historic importance. The Archivist of Manitoba has a specific legislated responsibility to facilitate access to archival records.

5.1.1 Hours of operation limit public access

We found that the Archives is open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with an hour closure over lunch. During this closure over lunch, visitors must exit the Archives. The Archives management confirmed that they had not surveyed users regarding the hours of operation and whether it satisfied their needs.

We benchmarked the operating hours for other government archives in Canada, and found 3 provincial archives were open Saturdays, and 3 had evening hours one day a week. We note that between January to April 2020, the Archives had been open the last Saturday of the month; however, this was stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic and has not resumed since the Archives re-opened in August 2021.

The Archives hours of operation mirror the time worked by government. These hours are less convenient for individuals who may work or attend school during the weekday. By expanding the hours of operation, Archives would provide greater opportunity for users to access records and would be more inclusive of varied schedules.

5.1.2 No process to identify if the client successfully located information

For records to be utilized, they must be identifiable, locatable, and retrievable. We expected that the Archives would provide resources to assist users in searching for, identifying, and retrieving records of interest. This would include whether the user was successful in locating the records they were looking for.

Management told us that staff provide an orientation for new users. This orientation can take place when someone visits the Archives Research Room (ARR), but can also occur online. The nature of the orientation will depend on the type of question or research the individual is pursuing. ARR staff will not conduct research on behalf of visitors. The assistance provided by ARR staff includes help with searches, pre-ordering records, navigating access protocols, or other procedural questions. When we visited the Archives of Manitoba, we did not observe any signage that an orientation could be provided to users. A search of the Archives' website shows that orientation is available for university and college classes, but there is nothing listed under visitor information.

Records may have access restrictions. These restrictions may be due to legislation, restrictions put in place by the donor, or due to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Restrictions are noted in Keystone. Restricted records require the client to obtain authorization before Archives will provide access to the record, and is to be checked by ARR staff members before retrieving the record.

The Archives has a standard time to retrieve records. This time varies depending on where the record is being stored:

- Records stored at the Archives building are retrieved on a schedule of every 30 minutes.
- Records stored at the GRC take a minimum of 2 business days. These can be requested online a minimum of 5 business days prior to visiting the Archives.

To assess the Archives' ability and processes for retrieving records, we obtained a representational sample of 68 records from all records in the Archives' Keystone database to determine if they could be located and retrieved within Archive's retrieval standard. While all were located within the time standard we found that 2 of the records retrieved were empty. As noted in **SECTION 4.3**, storage of empty files is an inefficient use of physical storage space.

To test access provisions, we tested a stratified, judgmental sample of 6 months of retrieval slips (totaling 1,365 retrieval slips) to ensure that appropriate access to the record was authorized. We found 27 retrieval slips did not have the access restrictions checked. These were subsequently reviewed and the restriction status identified. Of these, 3 were identified as restricted. In our sample, there were a total of 150 retrieval requests (including the 3 noted above) that were identified as having access restrictions; all had appropriate authorization on file.

We tested a representational sample of a further 64 retrievals (drawn randomly from the 1,365 retrieval slips reviewed above). These were traced to the Keystone entry to ensure that the access authorization noted in Keystone matched the access status noted by ARR staff on the retrieval slip. We identified no issues.

5.1.3 Archives promotes public awareness of records

The Archives is responsible for promoting public awareness of archival records. We found that there were both in-person and virtual events held during the period of our audit. Four in-person events or exhibits were held: the 100th anniversary of World War I, Doors Open Winnipeg (which included an exhibit on the Winnipeg General Strike), and the launch for the Manitoba 150 initiative. COVID-19 resulted in the

cancellation of Archives' in-person events. The Archives hosted 5 virtual film nights and in May 2020 created a YouTube channel.

In-person and virtual events were announced through media releases, on its website, and through social media.

Archives management indicated that they have longstanding relationships with several professors from local universities and some programs in Saskatchewan. Prior to COVID-19, the Archives offered Archive tours and orientations to these groups. Between April 1, 2019 and August 31, 2022, the Archives held 43 tours and orientations. Subsequently, the Archives has offered the orientation online. The Archives has kept the online orientation, as it provides a good introductory experience prior to a group's visit to the Archives.

5.1.4 Opportunities exist to obtain more client feedback

Feedback helps an organization to determine what worked well (or not), and find out what clients want. This, in turn, will potentially attract new clients.

We found that the Archives obtains feedback through:

- A section on its website for people to submit feedback,
- A comment box with printed forms in the Archives' Research Room.

Management stated that they received feedback 5 times over a 12-month period (March 2020 – April 2021) through the Archives website and none via the comment box (although the ARR was closed for extended periods at this time). No further feedback was received up to March 2023. None of the feedback that was received was related to user's feedback on obtaining records it was general information or reference requests.

For events held by the Archives, management said they do not formally capture feedback on comment cards or through satisfaction surveys. Management told us that they will debrief afterwards to identify what went well, and incorporate this information in planning future events.

We found that the Archives does not actively reach out for feedback. It relied on clients to provide verbal feedback on their experiences with the Archives. There is an opportunity for the Archives to be more proactive and reach out to users and obtain their feedback. This would provide valuable information on performance and how it can innovate its services to better serve its clients.



Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Archives establish a process to obtain feedback from users that can be used for future planning on how to improve their experience at the Archives including the option of adjusting operating hours to evenings and weekends.

5.2 Access to digital copies of records is limited

Online records allow clients to perform research at their own convenience, or from remote locations. We examined what the Archives has in place to facilitate online access to digitized copies of archival records.

5.2.1 Limited digitized copies of records available

Digitized copies of records are accessible through the Keystone database.

Digitization is the process where physical records are copied onto a digital format. However, the original record must be maintained and the **digital copy** must be preserved against obsolescence and data loss. Digitizing requires resources that may not be available; it can be costly and time-consuming. Digitizing every record may not be practical or required, such as records that are rarely used.

In deciding which records should be digitized, the Archives considers several factors; these include public interest, the opportunity to digitize the record, or because digitizing will support Archives' programs. For example, Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) microfilm records were digitized as a result of an initiative and interest from an external third party.

The Archives does not have a formal plan to identify physical records of interest for digitization.



Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Archives implement a digitization policy that establishes a process to identify records of public interest for digitization.

5.2.2 Access to older digital records not assured

Over time, changes in software and formats increase the risk that information stored in older formats will become inaccessible. As formats change, records need to be moved regularly from one system to another to maintain accessibility and usability.

There is no policy for updating digital records. This is compounded by the Archives' inability to store archival digital records. These records are stored within the department or agency which created the record. The Archives has identified that these digital records are in a multitude of formats on various media. In some cases, the data may be from 40-year-old legacy systems.

The actions to support a Digital Preservation System, as noted in **RECOMMENDATION 4**, should be considered in conjunction with this recommendation.



Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Archives implement a policy that ensures archival digital records are being moved regularly from one system to another.

Additional information about the audit

This independent assurance report was prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba on the Archives of Manitoba. Our responsibility was to provide objective information, advice and assurance to assist the Legislature in its scrutiny of the government's management of resources and programs, and to conclude on whether the Archives of Manitoba complies in all significant respects with the applicable criteria.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard for Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

The Office applies Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1, which requires the Office to design, implement and operate a system of quality management, including policies or procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

We have complied with the independence and other ethical requirements of the Code of Professional Conduct of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Manitoba, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality and professional behavior.

In accordance with our regular audit process, we obtained the following from management:

- Confirmation of management's responsibility for the subject under audit
- Acknowledgement of the suitability of the criteria used in the audit
- Confirmation that all known information that has been requested, or that could affect the findings or audit conclusion, has been provided

Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period between April 1, 2020 and August 31, 2022. This is the period to which the audit conclusion applies. However, to gain a more complete understanding of the subject matter of the audit, we also examined certain matters that preceded the audit coverage period.

Date of the audit report

We obtained sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which to base our conclusion on January 31, 2024, in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Summary of recommendations and responses from officials

This section provides a summary of all the recommendations we made, along with the responses from the Department of Sport, Culture, Heritage, and Tourism.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Archives formalize the Records and Information Management Framework as the policy on recordkeeping in the government of Manitoba.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation. The Archives of Manitoba prides itself on a comprehensive range of government recordkeeping guidance issued under the authority of section 8 of *The Archives and Recordkeeping Act* (the Act). We agree that updating the 2018 Records and Information Management Framework and formally adopting it as the policy on recordkeeping will benefit all government bodies subject to the Act.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Archives develop a proactive outreach program to meet annually with department officials to discuss recordkeeping responsibilities, updates and emerging issues.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation and is actively working with strategic partners and key stakeholders to enhance existing channels of communication and to identify new outreach opportunities. Education and raising awareness are critical to improving recordkeeping in the Government of Manitoba. A fully developed outreach program is beyond the current resource capacity of the Archives of Manitoba and further work should be undertaken to increase resources in both the Archives and departments/agencies for this important work.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Archives should:

- Work with appropriate parties to increase participation in record-keeping training.
- Develop training and guidance materials based on common issues, requests, questions and needs identified by those involved with records management.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation and will work with appropriate government stakeholders to promote the "Introduction to Records and Information Management in the Manitoba Government" training as a core public service requirement. The Archives has released new training

on the records transfer process (June 2023) and has planned for a comprehensive suite of new training and guidance related to the transformation of technology supporting the management of paper and digital records (currently in progress).

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Archives implement a digital preservation system to acquire, protect, preserve, and facilitate access to digital archival records.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation. The Archives of Manitoba has been actively working with strategic partners to identify and implement a digital preservation system solution that will enable the Archives to ingest, preserve, and provide access to archival records in digital form. A comprehensive digital preservation program is beyond the Archives' current resource capacity and an increase in resources should be considered to ensure the program's success.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that Archives should perform random spot checks of non – digital transfers to ensure that the description matches the physical records.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation. The Archives of Manitoba will continue to review archival records and accompanying lists supplied by government departments and agencies through processing, description and access-related activities.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Archives should formalize the protection and preservation practices currently in use.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation and Archives will formally adopt the standards it already uses.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Archives review previously identified risks and implement a long-term asset replacement plan for the building(s) and infrastructure that store archival records.

➤ Response of officials:

The department agrees with this recommendation and will continue to work with appropriate stakeholders to ensure revitalization of buildings and infrastructure.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Archives establish a process to obtain feedback from users that can be used for future planning on how to improve their experience at the Archives—including the option of adjusting operating hours to evenings and weekends.

➤ **Response of officials:**

The department agrees with this recommendation and Archives will establish a process to obtain feedback from users. The Archives also plans to resume service outside of regular business hours.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Archives implement a digitization policy that establishes a process to identify records of public interest for digitization.

➤ **Response of officials:**

The department agrees with this recommendation. The Archives of Manitoba will implement a policy for the creation of digitized copies of archival records that are made available through its online user interface. The Archives acknowledges that the provision of digital copies is one aspect of the work being done to improve the accessibility of archival records and to meet the evolving needs of its varied user groups.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Archives implement a policy that ensures archival digital records are being moved regularly from one system to another.

➤ **Response of officials:**

The department agrees with this recommendation and will implement policy in areas where the Archives of Manitoba has stewardship responsibility. The implementation of a digital preservation system will also ensure that the digital archival records created by the Government of Manitoba can be acquired and preserved by the Archives.

Analogue record

Any record which is not stored digitally, and could include records on paper, microfilm, or even clay tablets, as well as a record stored on non-digital electronic tape, disc, or wire. Analogue records may also be called physical records

Digital records

Records created, recorded, transmitted or stored in digital form by electronic, optical, magnetic or other, similar means.

Record

Data or information created or received by an organization in the course of its activities and used as an extension of human memory or to support accountability.

Recordkeeping

The entire range of functions involved in creating and managing records and information throughout their life cycle.

It includes:

- Creating and capturing records
- Organizing and using records
- Protecting and managing records
- Retaining and disposing of records

Recordkeeping also includes the policies, procedures, and systems used in the management of records.

Records Schedule

A formal plan that identifies specific government records, establish how long they should be retained, and if they should be destroyed or archived. The creation of Records Schedules is legislated by the ARA.

Semi-active records

Records which are no longer in use by the organization, but have not reached the disposition date and may be needed at a future date.

Stabilization

The minimal actions taken to enable records to be used in their original forms for as long as possible.

» Vision

Government accountability and public administration excellence for Manitobans.

» Mission

To provide independent information, advice and assurance on government operations and the management of public funds.

» Values

Independence – We are independent from government and our work is objective and unbiased.

Integrity – We act with honesty and uphold high ethical standards.

Innovation – We promote innovation and creativity in what we do and how we do it.

Teamwork – We work as a team by sharing each other's knowledge and skills to reach our goals.

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The Office of the Auditor General of Manitoba acknowledges with respect that we conduct our work on the ancestral lands of Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, and Nehethowuk Nations, and on the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.



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