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Presenter:
William A. Cooney, PhD., Archivist, Library and Archives Canada

Title:
Rethinking government records in Canada: Library and Archives Canada’s reframed government records program from analogue disposition to digital discoverability

Abstract:
In 2004, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) was formed by merging the former National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada into a single institution that houses Canada’s shared documentary heritage that spans the country’s entire history. The LAC is the Canadian government institution uniquely responsible to “serve as the continuing memory of the government of Canada and its institutions.” Within the government of Canada, the Librarian and Archivist of Canada holds the responsibility of determining the historical or archival value of government records and the unique power to approve the disposition of government records by federal institutions.

In the Fall of 2014, the Auditor General of Canada chastised the LAC for not fulfilling its mandate. The subsequent report identified a series of issues which were contributing to the LAC not acquiring all the archival records it should from federal institutions. The LAC’s response to this report was bold, vigorous and nothing less than a complete re-thinking of how the LAC delivers all aspects of its core mandate from disposition of records by government departments to discoverability of government records to researchers.

This paper will present an overview of how the LAC completely reframed its approach to government records disposition within the Government of Canada to achieve complete disposition coverage, while preserving the key concepts of the LAC’s underlying macroappraisal methodology. It will examine the successes and challenges encountered during a reconceptualization process that encompassed an institutional culture shift. It will also address some of the on-going challenges and impacts these changes have had on the LAC’s additional responsibilities of providing advice to government institutions and of making government records discoverable and accessible to researchers.

Bio:
William Cooney received his PhD from the University of Durham in the United Kingdom in 2011. For the past five years, he has worked as a Government Records archivist with Library and Archives Canada. He was instrumental in rethinking the tools needed to operationalize LAC’s new disposition program. He is currently based in Malaysia.