



# SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS ARCHIVES IN ALBERTA: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT

archives  
SOCIETY OF ALBERTA

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Archives Society of Alberta is situated in Amiskwacîywâskahikan on Indigenous land within Treaty 6 Territory and within the Métis homelands. We acknowledge the North Saskatchewan River as a site of confluence that has been a traditional meeting ground since time immemorial and a site that continues to be a place of relationship building in the modern day. This region continues to be the traditional territory of many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This includes the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4, the nêhiyawak (Cree), Denesuline (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinabe (Saulteaux) and the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot). Indigenous peoples were at the forefront of this work, and we wanted to begin by expressing our gratitude for the openness, trust and conversation that provided foundational guidance for the Archives Society of Alberta to carry out this work.

We would also like to thank our funding providers and partners for this project, the Government of Alberta, the Edmonton Heritage Council, and University nuhelot'ine thâyots'I nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills. We would especially like to thank the numerous Indigenous First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, Elders, and Indigenous organizations who have generously contributed their time and stories to this project. Your guidance has been vital to this project, and it would not have been a success without your valuable support.

Ay-hiy | Thank you

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## Executive Summary

The Archives Society of Alberta is located in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, also known as Edmonton, Alberta, within both Treaty 6 Territory and the Métis homelands. This land has served as a traditional meeting ground and continues to be a place of relationship building and the traditional territory of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and communities. We want to acknowledge that Indigenous people were at the forefront of this work and begin by expressing our gratitude for the trust, communication, and time that was spent with us to provide foundational guidance for the Archives Society of Alberta to carry forward this work.

This organization recognizes that this needs assessment survey and report is just one part of an ongoing commitment to reconciliation. Part of this commitment is a continued effort to support, empower and amplify the voices of Indigenous people and communities in Alberta. A priority of this work has been to centre the voices and real encounters of Indigenous people's experiences of accessing archives in the province. Throughout our community engagements, we heard wide-ranging experiences, issues and feedback related to archives, cultural knowledge, data sovereignty and the impacts of the Indian Residential school system. This report, "Supporting Indigenous Archives in Alberta," summarizes the results of our Indigenous Needs Assessment survey and engagement sessions, and actionable steps for moving forward.

In Spring 2024, the ASA offered a series of community engagement sessions to seek input from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples on:

1. Current use of archives.
2. Barriers to accessing records in public archives.
3. Training and capacity development needs.

Participants shared insights on cultural knowledge, data sovereignty, socio-economic impacts, the trauma and history of the Indian Residential School system, and opportunities for reconciliation. While our conversations touched on many important aspects, we recognized that there were three overarching themes: Accessing Archives, Training and Capacity Development and Relationship Building, which will inform the development of our future programming, services, and ongoing relationship-building. We hope that this report and recommendations will guide our member organizations in continuing to better serve Indigenous communities. Addressing the archives and records access needs for Indigenous communities in Alberta is a collective effort.

We thank everyone who contributed to the Indigenous Needs Assessment survey. Your input is vital in creating recommendations and best practices for long-term support of Indigenous archives.

## About Archives Society of Alberta

The Archives Society of Alberta (ASA) is a not-for-profit professional association which supports archives and archivists in Alberta. Formed in 1981, the ASA is mandated to support the needs of archival professionals and organizations that meet the needs of their communities. The ASA has nearly 200 members and welcomes archivists, archival workers, archives and supporters to join our community.

In Alberta, there is no overarching body or society that represents the voices of Indigenous archives in the province. Due to this gap, the ASA has seen a growing need to support Indigenous communities with their archival needs. Over the last several years, First Nations, Métis and Inuit community members and organizations have sought out the ASA with requests for support for:

- Archival Information on their community
- Site visit requests
- To teach courses with Indigenous-specific content
- Advice for setting up their own archival programs
- Seeking out digitization and Audio-Visual courses.

Over the last several years, the ASA has seen increased requests from Indigenous communities and organizations demonstrating a need for support and capacity development across many areas. To take a targeted approach and meet the needs of Indigenous communities and their archival programming, the ASA determined the most appropriate approach was to conduct a Needs Assessment with Indigenous communities in Alberta.

## Introduction and Background

The Archives Society of Alberta's *Supporting Indigenous Archive Project* seeks to understand the needs and challenges that Indigenous communities face when accessing archives, training opportunities and more. This project includes two parts: the first is a Needs Assessment survey and report. The needs assessment allows the ASA to engage with Indigenous community members and organizations that are currently engaged in archival work within their roles in work and community. The second was the development of introductory training for Indigenous archives, which was a four-day pilot training initiative.

This work has also been guided by the Canadian Archival community's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action, specifically Call #70.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, the Steering Committee of Canada's Archives (SCCA) released the *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Taskforce* as a roadmap with eight principles to guide reconciliation efforts with Indigenous partners. Recommendations from both the Calls to Action and the SCCA's *Reconciliation Framework* are interconnected with the principles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, which is a key framework in guiding reconciliation work. Both the TRC and UNDRIP can be used as progress markers to ensure these policies are being implemented and upheld.

ASA began seeking out funding for this project in 2017, with several unsuccessful attempts. While challenges to accessing project funding delayed the advancement of this project, it led to an exciting partnership with University nuhelot'ine thâyots'I nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (UnBQ). This partnership also allowed for the development of the *Introductory Training for Indigenous Archives Pilot Course* which fulfills a need both the ASA and UnBQ had been trying to develop for some time.<sup>2</sup>

Reconciliation is an ongoing commitment and is at the forefront of this project. Part of reconciliation is acknowledging the harm that archival institutions have caused in the past. In order to move forward, archival institutions must acknowledge the harmful past and colonial foundation that archives have been built upon. Archives have had a large role to play in concealing and misrepresenting history and its impact on Indigenous peoples. In order to move forward, there must be acknowledgement of the harm done by archival processes and the archival community.<sup>3</sup> This history must be acknowledged, and instead, we need to share the diverse stories and histories across all audiences.

The ASA's goal is to better support Indigenous communities with the tools and knowledge they require to be empowered in their archives. Information gathered from the survey and engagement sessions will identify key priorities that the ASA should focus on developing going forward. Responses gathered will inform which short-term and long-term steps should be taken to support Indigenous communities in their archival work. The commitment to reconciliation is a shared responsibility that cannot just be placed on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples.

A note on terminology: we recognize that Indigenous peoples and communities are distinct, separate groups with their own unique histories, languages, and cultural practices. The

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<sup>1</sup> Call to Action #70 speaks to the archival community, specifically to the Canadian Association of Archivists. For more information, please see the *Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Please note, while we reference the ASA's pilot training course in this report, it is still in the pilot phase, and more information on future training opportunities will become available at a later date.

<sup>3</sup> The Steering Committee on Canada's Archives, *Reconciliation Framework: The Response to the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Taskforce*, 18.

Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. For this report, we have chosen to use the collective term “Indigenous” and the individual or community names when possible.

## Methodology

In spring 2024, the ASA held three half-day community engagement sessions across the province, as well as an information session as part of the ASA’s pilot training course participants. Each session began with a blessing from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper identified by their community, followed by a round of introductions. We closed each session with a circle of takeaways from the day.

Invitations were sent out to communities across the province that the ASA had previously had a relationship with cold-calling or who we were referred to. All survey respondents had expertise based in their cultural and community knowledge, recordkeeping process and experiences they have had in this sector. In preparation for this work, the ASA conducted research on Indigenous people’s access to archives as well as relevant issues. A brief visual presentation of the ASA’s programs and services, as well as background information on the project, was provided at each gathering.

Engagements took place from April 2024 to May 2024 and were coordinated using a regionally based approach. The ASA planned to host four engagement sessions, but we only carried out three of those sessions. A session was planned for at the Sagitawa Friendship Society in Peace River, AB, but unfortunately, we did not have attendees at this session. We received 34 completed surveys and had 39 participants across our engagement and training sessions. Survey responses were more heavily weighted toward Southern Alberta, as we had the highest number of attendees at these sessions. Our sessions took place in the following locations:

- Tsuut’ina Culture/Museum in Tsuut’ina, AB.
- Archives Society of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.
- Red Crow Community College, Standoff, AB.
- Introductory Training for Indigenous Archives Pilot Course, Edmonton, AB.

Discussion questions were developed based on our project goals to generate ideas and gather insights regarding their priorities for archives and programming. Importantly, we allowed for some flexibility to pose questions based on the discussion topics that arose during the sessions. These questions were designed to be open-ended to allow for discussion and idea generation. The small participant size of our groups allowed for discussion to take place in one group.

Please note that while we considered making the survey available online and conducting virtual engagement sessions, we did not feel this was appropriate given we were focused on relationship building. Our approach was to focus on in-person engagements and conversations where possible, and we did provide the survey link to engagement session participants to follow up and complete after the session or share with their colleagues and other community members who were interested.

## Review of Findings

This section will provide an overview of the findings from the survey responses, engagement sessions and conversations. Organized by theme, many of the comments and feedback we collected overlap and may share characteristics with other themes. Our findings are organized into three overarching themes, followed by a set of recommendations for that theme.

- **Accessing Archives**
- **Training and Capacity Development**
- **Relationship Building**

### Accessing Archives

The word “access” came up several times in different contexts, in both surveys and engagement sessions. Access can be thought of in many different ways, such as access to space, resources, opportunities for training, or barriers to access. In our discussions, the main focus was on accessing different types of records and what that experience has been like for participants. Each person’s experience was different, and their level of access or ability to gain access largely depended on who owned the archival institution.

We asked respondents whether they had accessed local public archival institutions, how contact was initiated and what their experience had been like. Most respondents had accessed local archives, either in-person or by accessing online databases. There was an even split between respondents who had been contacted, and those who had not. These figures were surprising to use because the ASA had heard anecdotally that engagement had been much lower. While this contact indicates that more outreach is occurring, there is still much work that needs to be done. We also asked participants if they had any recommendations for public archival institutions to better serve Indigenous communities and their organizations. A general consensus was that there needs to be a stronger desire in non-Indigenous institutions to connect with Indigenous communities. One participant noted that they weren’t “ready to open up to non-community resources” and did not feel comfortable accessing public archival institutions. Another respondent commented that their experience working with and trying to access non-Indigenous institutions varied and that, “some were easier to work with than others.” (See Appendix A)

While these findings did not align with our initial assumptions, we can infer that although there has been some progress, there is still more work to be done. Relationship building is an ongoing process, that must continue and be an ongoing endeavor. Public archival institutions must continue to advocate for Indigenous people to access their materials and information related to their communities. Because Indigenous people still report that they continue to face barriers or gatekeeping with accessing the information they are seeking.

**“Museums and archives in Alberta do not take a proactive approach to letting First Nations communities know that they have items from those communities.”**

### *Information Sharing*

Information sharing was highlighted as a key priority for participants. This included resource sharing, information about funding opportunities, marketing and social media and communication in general. Since the TRC was published in 2015, more Indigenous communities, organizations, and researchers have sought out Indian Residential School records. As part of this search, the importance of archives has been illuminated for its role in truth-telling. More importantly, First Nations, Métis and Inuit community members have been seeking out information about everything related to their communities. There has been rise in requests to learn more about their community information, historical documents in an effort to counter the loss of culture and reclaim knowledge about their communities.

Although it has been almost a decade since the TRC Calls to Action were published, Indigenous peoples still face many barriers to accessing their records. A 2020 study from the Indigenous Australian context of accessing archives reveals that trauma impacts not only the wellbeing of individuals but has a collective impact.<sup>4</sup> Some of the impacts of not having access to records include frustration, lateral violence, concerns about understanding, care and interpretation of records, offensive records and role confusion, and the disappointment at unfulfilled expectations when accessing archival materials. A sentiment shared by one participant was that “everything is so secretive” and that public institutions should be making an effort to inform the community of their goings on. A willingness to collaborate and share information is important.

While public archival institutions have been mandated to make their records accessible, the path is not always clear, and there are many issues that prevent this from happening. Due to the advancement of policies and procedures, records are more available in the broader sense; however, Indigenous people continue to have little agency over their records. This can include, where they are held, how they are stored and who can access them. Indigenous people face inherent challenges when searching for information about their communities in archives.<sup>5</sup> Issues that arise include ownership, copyright, and de-accessioning protocols.

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<sup>4</sup> Joanne Evans, Shannon Faulkhead, Kristen Thorpe, Karen Adams, Lauren Booker and Narissa Timbery, “Indigenous Archiving and Wellbeing: Surviving, Thriving and Reconciling,” In *Community Archives, Community Spaces: Heritage, Memory and Identity*, edited by Jeannette Bastian and Andrew Finn, 134.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Isbister, “Indigenous History Month | Challenge in Indigenous Archiving,” University of Alberta, (June 22, 2021) <https://news.library.ualberta.ca/blog/2021/06/22/indigenous-history-month-challenges-in-indigenous-archiving/>.

The root of this problem is that archival materials often came into the hands of institutions without Indigenous people's consent or Knowledge.<sup>6</sup> While these materials should never have been collected in the first place, what we can do today to counter this is to work with Indigenous communities to create community informed access parameters.

### *Right to Know*

The "Right to Know" is enshrined in UNDRIP and is a set of principles which proclaim that Indigenous peoples have the "the inalienable right to know the truth about what happened and why, with regards to human rights violations committed against them in residential schools."<sup>7</sup> With this understanding, access to archives and records are human rights, falling under the purview of justice and reconciliation. The *Right to Know* is increasingly being asserted within the archival profession. Having open access to archives enriches knowledge and can enhance quality of life. One participant noted that there needs to be more awareness that, "we have the right to information." Indigenous people have a right to access records that are written about them without having to face so many barriers.

#### **Access Recommendations:**

- **Archival institutions need to confront notions of collective ownership and recognize that self-determination and ownership of records is foundational so that each person, Nation or organization can access their own stories and histories.**
- **Public archival institutions must make accessing their records a more user-friendly experience and should create innovative ways to access information, such as creating online resources that link training to Indigenous communities directly.**
- **Create ready-to-go information-sharing agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with Indigenous communities. Having documents in place or establishing a process for improving access is key.**
- **Advocate for Indigenous peoples' access to their materials and information while acknowledging that many forms of knowledge can coexist within archival institutions.**

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<sup>6</sup> Isbister, *Indigenous History Month*.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Jane Logan McCallum, "Indigenous People, Archives and History," Shekon Neechie, An Indigenous History Site, updated Jun 21, 2018.

- **Archival institutions need to confront notions of collective ownership and recognize that self-determination and ownership of records is foundational so that each person, Nation or organization can access their own stories and histories.**

## Training and Capacity Development

Training and capacity development were the topics discussed the most during our engagement sessions. A large portion of our needs assessment survey was dedicated to questions about training. We asked questions to gauge where communities are currently at and what type of capacity they would like to build within their communities. Capacity development across different areas is strongly needed, however, one of the biggest capacity challenges that communities are experiencing is finding staff to do the work (See Appendix B).

We asked participants how they would describe their training and experience level with archival work. The majority of respondents indicated that they had no previous training in archival studies. However, many indicated they did have education or training in another field. Some indicated they were self-taught and learned on the job. This indicates a gap in available opportunities for Indigenous people to learn archival practices.

Many types of training options were presented, such as introductory training, both hard skills and soft skills, and not surprisingly, we received a high level of interest and responses across almost all options presented (See Appendix C). This response demonstrates that there is a desire for many types of training. The most popular and most selected type of training was “introductory training.” Training requests also included:

- Archival database training
- Copyright and privacy legislation
- Data Sovereignty
- Cost to training is a barrier
- Hands-on training
- Difficult to find appropriate training
- Professional development and certification
- Training aimed a multiple/different target groups
- Develop short 10-15 topic focused videos
- YouTube video series

Our findings demonstrate that there is a high interest in accessing all types of training to build capacity for archival practices in Indigenous communities. While topics can be wide ranging, what is most important is that training be offered on an ongoing, regular basis.

Whether that is training for Indigenous communities or for staff working in archival institutions, capacity development must be continual.

## Accessing Training

Access to training was discussed a considerable amount. Many participants in our engagement sessions shared that they were not aware of the training offered by different archival and post-secondary institutions. When asked what method of delivery they preferred, participants indicated that they preferred blended training options, seeing the value of being in a group for discussion, relationship building and sharing best practices. Additionally, they requested physical materials like textbooks, handouts, and worksheets to be able to continue self-directed study at their own pace.

Digital and online access to training were also favourable. Organizations that are unable to facilitate in-person training could consider creating online content for Indigenous audiences on their website. Those offering training must take into consideration that less than 43% of First Nations households living on-reserve had access to high-speed internet in 2021.<sup>8</sup> Offering a variety of accessible training options is key.

## Technology

Navigating changing technology was also discussed significantly. Participants expressed concerns about the ability to navigate rapidly changing technology, the evolution of storage, and technological obsolescence. Having access to technology is empowering. It is also worth noting that some communities still require the most basic equipment, such as computers and printers. Having access to these most basic technology tools is something that is often forgotten as a need for Indigenous communities. Digitization and digital access to information was needed. One of the most requested skills when it came to technology was digitization (See Appendix C). This included:

- Navigating media formats
- Managing digital information/Data Storage
- Requests for Indigenous Content Management system like *Mukurtu*<sup>9</sup>
- Requests for digitization training or workshops
- Access to digitization equipment

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<sup>8</sup> Samantha Schwientek, “First Nations high-speed internet access lagging behind Canadian average,” CBC News, April 19, 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-high-speed-internet-access-lagging-behind-canadian-average-1.6815370>

<sup>9</sup> Mukurtu (MOOK-oo-too) is a grassroots project that aims to empower Indigenous communities to manage their own digital heritage in a cultural relevant way. This is a free, mobile and open-source platform. Mukurtu, “Welcome to Mukurtu CMS,” accessed on July 17, 2024, <https://mukurtu.org/>.

In one of our community engagement sessions, participants also had a very lively discussion about the potential that innovative technology can have on cultural preservation. Rather than focusing on what they lacked, they were rather excited about modern technology and how it engages younger audiences. Technology can be challenging to navigate because it changes so quickly, but it can also be a tool for sustaining Indigenous knowledge and history.

### *Archival Profession/Focus on Indigenous Youth*

One solution to increasing capacity for Indigenous communities is increasing awareness of Archives as a profession. We asked participants how the archival community could be more appealing to their community members, and they talked about getting youth involved. One participant noted, “Archives is still a largely unknown profession in Indigenous communities.” According to the 2021 Canadian Census, the Indigenous population in Alberta and the rest of Canada is young and is the fastest-growing demographic. In Alberta, close to half of the Indigenous population is under the age of 25.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous youth have unprecedented potential to increase diversity and cultural awareness within this profession.

One of the challenges is access to formal training in a post-secondary institution. There are no post-secondary institutions in Alberta that offer accredited degree programs in archival training. This means that those who are interested in archival professions must leave the province to pursue higher education in this field. This can be a daunting reality and discourage Indigenous youth from wanting to pursue archival studies as a career path for many reasons some of which include financial barriers and wanting to stay close to their family and community. A short-term solution could be creating on-the-job learning opportunities for Indigenous youth through internships that provide them with steps towards an archival career. A long-term goal could also be the development of an Alberta-based archives program to foster the development of future Indigenous archivists in the province.

#### **Training and Capacity Development Recommendations:**

- **Public archival institutions should create opportunities to engage Indigenous youth in the archival profession through hands-on learning opportunities such as internships or partnering with Indigenous schools.**
- **Create accessible, online content, toolkits and other resources to allow Indigenous communities to learn at their own pace.**

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Alberta, “2021 Census of Canada: Indigenous Peoples,” March 22, 2203.

- **All training should centre Indigenous perspectives and include trauma-informed practices, ethics of care and culturally safe.**
- **Increased outreach to Indigenous communities and organizations is needed to create more awareness about program offerings. Strategies should combine a variety of outreach methods that include using social media platforms, connecting over the phone, or in-person by hosting information session in community.**
- **Foundational and accessible training is needed in all archival topic areas. However, public archival institutions should consult Indigenous communities when creating training opportunities in their region to gauge their interests and needs.**

## Relationship Building

Relationship building is highly valued in Indigenous communities. Archival professionals should first focus on building trust and relationships with the local Indigenous communities and organizations they serve. Keeping Indigenous partners informed when there are changes to practices is also important.<sup>11</sup> Another piece that must be acknowledged is that cultural and heritage institutions are interconnected and that this work is bigger than just one institution. Jessie Loyer, a Cree-Métis writer and librarian, asserts that public institutions such as archives, museums, libraries, art centres, and culture centres should be considered as having a more holistic relationship. These memory institutions are all parts of a whole that bring the whole story together. Some of the values of relationship building that arose in our sessions include:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Respect
- Transparency
- Accountability

These values should be considered the foundation of relationships between archival institutions and Indigenous communities. Importantly, for relationships to be impactful and long-lasting means a level of commitment that requires time. Efforts must be ongoing and based on mutual learning and respect.<sup>12</sup> Relationship building is not simply checking off a box on your strategic plans or yearly goals. Relationship building requires more than one engagement session with a community.

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<sup>11</sup> Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan, “Community First: Indigenous Community-based Archival Provenance,” *Special Issue on Unsettling the Archives, Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*, (2012 – November 8): 23-32.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, Faulkhead, Thorpe, Adams, Booker and Timberly, “Indigenous Archiving and Wellbeing,” 140-141.

**“There needs to be a better desire in these organizations [non-Indigenous] and in the people who work there to start picking up the phone and calling First Nations communities to tell them they have items from there and start building that relationship.”**

### *Trauma-Informed Practices*

Due to the sensitive nature of our discussions and the fact that we were discussing how historical injustices have impacted our practices today, it became apparent very quickly that trauma-informed practices are an important aspect to include in any type of community engagement or training. There has been much research that demonstrates that it can be very difficult for Indigenous people to access their records, as the details within those records detail history that is inherently traumatic.<sup>13</sup> Even if the records or material itself may not be traumatic, historical language that has been used can be racist or derogatory to Indigenous peoples, which can make accessing archives a difficult experience for Indigenous peoples.

Mary Jane McCallum, a Professor and Canada Research chair in Indigenous people, History and Archives at the University of Winnipeg, speaks to the experiences that Indigenous people often face at archives. “At the archives, researchers are confronted by the state—literally at the door. Registration is necessary, and federally employed, mostly older ex-military security officers guard the building, the boxes of records, the talking and when possible, the cameras researchers use to photograph records.”<sup>14</sup> With an increased interest and desire for Indigenous people to access archival records, the need for cultural safety protocols and wellbeing is a growing concern.<sup>15</sup>

**“Acknowledging that certain practices were detrimental to Indigenous communities and contributed to social malaise, dysfunction and poverty.”**

### *Community of Practice*

One of the strongest pieces of feedback we received during our engagement sessions was how grateful participants were to be able to gather, share and build their networks. We asked how the ASA could facilitate more access; an important part was access to each other. Having the opportunity to be in the same space and network through these engagement sessions resonated deeply with participants. Participants recommended that the ASA host a community of practice where we could bring in archival professionals and host training and webinars with practical information. Bringing Indigenous people together can drive archival sovereignty by gathering and working collectively to create community-

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<sup>13</sup> Isbister, “Indigenous History Month.”

<sup>14</sup> McCallum, “Indigenous People, Archives and History,” Shekon Neechie, An Indigenous History Site.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, Faulkhead, Thorpe, Adams, Booker and Timbery, “Indigenous Archiving and Wellbeing,” 142.

driven archival work that helps Indigenous people self-determine their archival work, and be the stewards of their own cultural materials, histories and knowledge.

One of the strongest pieces of feedback we received during our engagement sessions was how grateful participants were to be able to gather, share, and build their networks. We asked how the ASA could facilitate more access, and an important part was access to each other. The opportunity to be in the same space and network through these engagement sessions resonated deeply with participants. They recommended that the ASA host a community of practice where we could bring in archival professionals and host training and webinars with practical information. Bringing Indigenous people together can drive archival sovereignty, self-determination and opportunities to work collectively to create their own solutions for maintaining Indigenous collective memory and knowledge.

#### **Relationship Building Recommendations:**

- **Relationship building should be the first priority when working with Indigenous communities. Public archival institutions must foster ongoing, meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities.**
- **Archival institutions should explore ways to build communities of practices for Indigenous peoples where they can gather, connect, share knowledge, build relationships and learn best practices.**
- **Incorporate trauma-informed practices, mental health support, and care when engaging with the community or offering training. Cultural awareness training should also be made available to employees of public archival institutions that serve Indigenous peoples.**

## **Suggestions for Future Engagements**

The engagement process was met with some challenges with attendance and participation in the needs assessment survey. Due to lower-than-expected participation in our Edmonton session, we were able to invite (and extend our sample size to include participants of the Introductory Training for Indigenous Archives pilot course, which was concurrently being developed at the time of the needs assessment. While the ASA is grateful for the funding received for this project, it must be noted that project funding was a limitation for carrying out engagement sessions. One of the biggest challenges was working within the parameters of the funding the ASA received for this project, which was lower than requested. This impacted the ability to carry out engagement sessions in the way that we would have liked. Preferably, it would have been ideal to have at least one or two more engagement sessions to be able to deploy our team more evenly across northern Alberta and across central Alberta.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities are geographically spread out across the province, and some communities are more isolated than others. This is especially true for northern Alberta. According to the 2021 Canadian Census, the proportion of Indigenous people is “widely distributed” throughout northern regions of the province. They are also the greatest underserved communities. In the future, having the ability and the resources to reach out individually and visit communities one-on-one would likely see more engagement. In some cases, it would have been easier to connect with Indigenous communities one-on-one and visit in person to discuss the project.

Another challenge with engagement sessions is that it is difficult for people to leave work or other commitments for a full-day engagement session. While we tried to be accommodating and offer sessions in locations that were more evenly accessible, many of the engagement session participants were still required to travel for several hours. Some needed to spend a night overnight in the city for instance, in order to attend a session. Many respondents talk about wearing multiple hats in their communities and for the organizations they work for, so stepping away from their role for one to two days is a lot to ask. Low attendance could also be attributed to communities having more pressing matters occurring in their communities, such as an increase in natural disasters and health crises. Another aspect of this is that the low participation also indicates that more outreach is needed from this organization, and other public archival institutions in general.

### *Project Successes*

- Overall, the feedback from the *Supporting Indigenous Archives* project has been positive. Many participants expressed gratitude to the ASA for initiating this conversation.
- The biggest success factor was how engagement sessions brought people together who are working towards the same goal of advancing their communities’ archives.
- Relationship building was a key component of this project. Through this project the ASA was able to build new relationships with Indigenous communities, as well as strengthening our ongoing relationships.

### *Project Limitations*

- ASA experienced challenges recruiting for the Indigenous Community Researcher role, which delayed the start of this project. This impacted our initial timeline, as we had to push back many of our milestones and engagement sessions.
- Attendance at our engagement sessions was lower than anticipated. This could have been due to our shortened timeline between sessions, which did not allow for sufficient outreach to Indigenous communities.
- Our travel budget was limited, and ideally, we would have liked to host engagement sessions in more than one region in Northern Alberta and Central Alberta.
- We could not offer the participants an honorarium for their time and to assist with their travel, but we were able to provide a small gift as a thank-you.



## Summary of Recommendations

### **Access Recommendations:**

- Archival institutions need to confront notions of collective ownership and recognize that self-determination and ownership of records is foundational so that each person, Nation or organization can access their own stories and histories.
- Public archival institutions must make accessing their records a more user-friendly experience and should create innovative ways to access information, such as creating online resources that link training to Indigenous communities directly.
- Create ready-to-go information-sharing agreements and Memorandums of Understanding with Indigenous communities. Having documents in place or establishing a process for improving access is key.
- Advocate for Indigenous peoples' access to their materials and information while acknowledging that many forms of knowledge can coexist within archival institutions.
- Archival institutions need to confront notions of collective ownership and recognize that self-determination and ownership of records is foundational so that each person, Nation or organization can access their own stories and histories.

### **Training and Capacity Development Recommendations:**

- Public archival institutions should create opportunities to engage Indigenous youth in the archival profession through hands-on learning opportunities such as internships or partnering with Indigenous schools.
- Create accessible, online content, toolkits and other resources to allow Indigenous communities to learn at their own pace.
- All training should centre Indigenous perspectives and include trauma-informed practices, ethics of care and culturally safe.
- Increased outreach to Indigenous communities and organizations is needed to create more awareness about program offerings. Strategies should combine a variety of outreach methods that include using social media platforms,

connecting over the phone, or in-person by hosting information session in community.

### **Relationship Building Recommendations:**

- Relationship building should be the first priority when working with Indigenous communities. Public archival institutions must foster ongoing, meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities.
- Archival institutions should explore ways to build communities of practices for Indigenous peoples where they can gather, connect, share knowledge, build relationships and learn best practices.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices, mental health support, and care when engaging with the community or offering training. Cultural awareness training should also be made available to employees of public archival institutions that serve Indigenous peoples.
- Foundational and accessible training is needed in all archival topic areas. However, public archival institutions should consult Indigenous communities when creating training opportunities in their region to gauge their interests and needs.

## Conclusion: Future Direction for the ASA

The Archives Society of Alberta will use the findings of this project to guide the development of future programming, training opportunities, and support for our Indigenous community partners. Throughout 2025-26, we aim to build a strategic plan guided by reconciliation-based archival practices that are intentional and include ongoing processes for continued engagement with Indigenous communities.

### Recommendations for Future work at ASA:

- **Creation of a Long-term Strategic Plan:** The Archives Society of Alberta supports the creation of a long-term strategic plan to carry this work forward, continue to build trust, continuity and sustainability in our relationships with our Indigenous partners. The strategic plan will encompass strategic goals, both short-term and long-term that focus on building on the ASA's current resources and creating solutions that focus on responsive community-focused programming and services with measurable outcomes.
- **Advocating for a Full-Time Indigenous Role at the ASA:** This project demonstrated the need to build capacity within the Archives Society of Alberta through a dedicated Indigenous staff member. This role could be either an Indigenous Engagement Lead or an Indigenous Archives Advisor, which would be a full-time role dedicated to further building relationships with Indigenous communities and provide capacity development support and outreach.
- **Additional Training, Resources, and Capacity Building:** Creation of more training opportunities for Indigenous community members. This will include hosting topical webinars, amplifying critical narratives, and supporting fundraising for community projects.
- **Creation of a Community of Practice:** Prioritize the development of a community of practice for Indigenous archives in the province.

This work is ongoing, and the relationships we build will continue beyond individuals within our organization. It is imperative to continue advocating for and increasing the presence, voices, and knowledge of Indigenous people.

To learn more about the Archives Society of Alberta, connect with us at:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/archivesalberta/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/archives-society-of-alberta>

Website: [www.archivesalberta.org](http://www.archivesalberta.org)

Mailing Address:

Archives Society of Alberta

Prince of Wales Armouries and Heritage Centre

10440 108 Ave NW #216  
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## Appendix A: Survey Demographics

Figure A1. Needs Assessment Survey responses to self-identification.

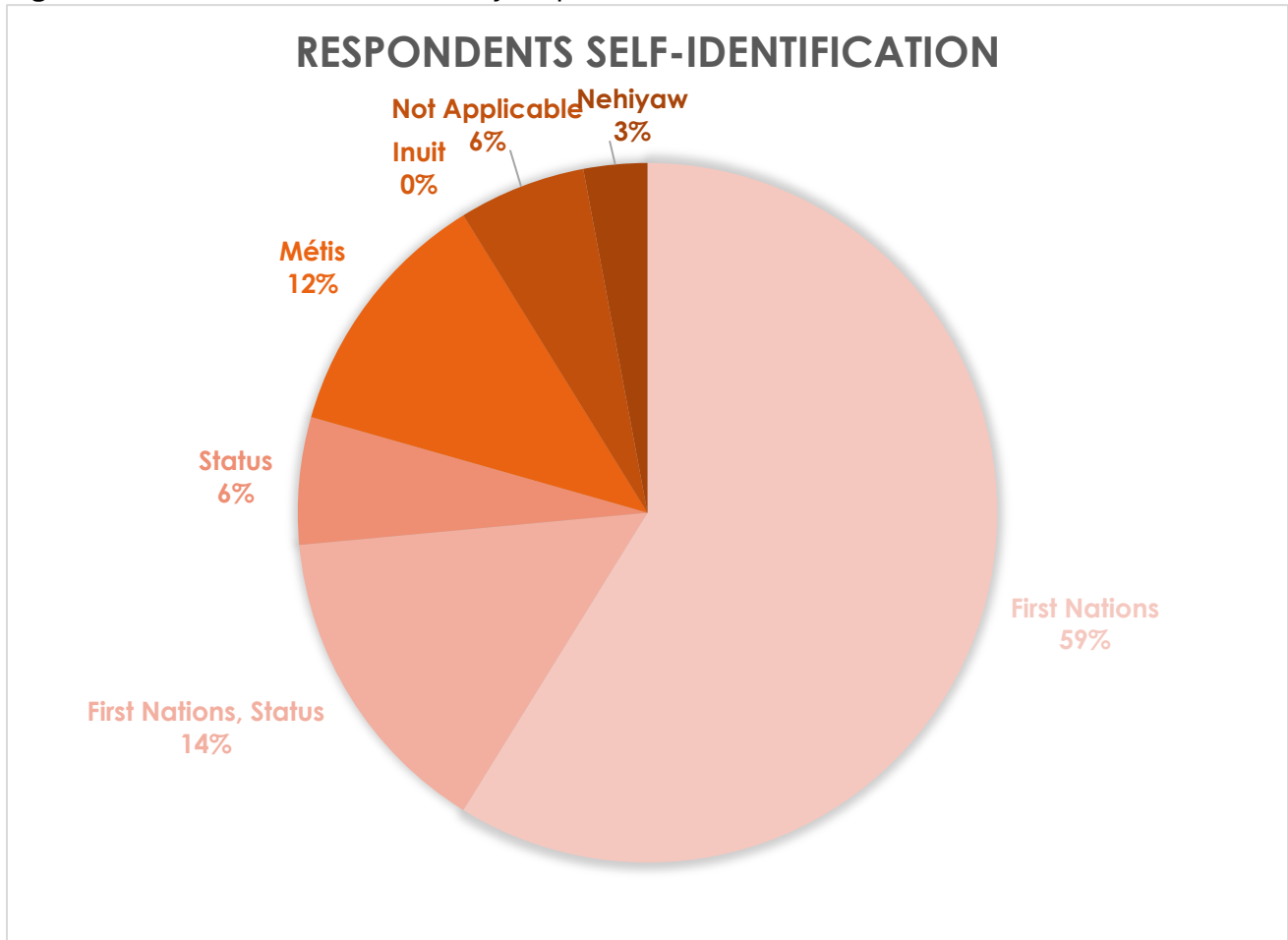


Table A1. Survey respondents Demographic Information

Question	Responses
What is your primary job title or role? (Please note: Duplicates and identifying features were removed for anonymity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Archivist</li> <li>• Archive/General Researcher</li> <li>• Archivist/Human Resources</li> <li>• Consultant/Education &amp; Culture</li> <li>• Consultation/Manager</li> <li>• Community Member/Director</li> <li>• Data Collection Assistant</li> <li>• Director, Indigenous Leadership</li> <li>• Education Coordinator</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment Facilitator</li> <li>• Elder Advisory Council</li> <li>• Language and Culture Project Coordinator/Executive Assistant</li> <li>• Library Manager</li> <li>• Indian Residential School Researcher</li> <li>• I.T. Technician</li> <li>• Lands and Membership Director</li> <li>• Library Technician</li> <li>• Post-Secondary Student</li> <li>• Project Coordinator</li> <li>• Researcher</li> <li>• Senior Language Revitalization Coordinator</li> <li>• Writing Centre Coordinator</li> </ul>
<p>Community Name or Affiliation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity</li> <li>• Beaver First Nation</li> <li>• Blood Tribe (Kainai)</li> <li>• Blood Tribe IRS Unmarked Burial Sites Project</li> <li>• Cold Lake First Nations</li> <li>• Fishing Lake Métis Settlement</li> <li>• Frog Lake First Nations</li> <li>• Frog Lake Public Library</li> <li>• Kehewin Cree Nation Consultation</li> <li>• Maskwacis Education Schools Commission</li> <li>• Mikaisto Red Crow Community College</li> <li>• Otipemisiwak Métis Government</li> <li>• Paul First Nation</li> <li>• Piikani First Nation</li> <li>• Saddle Lake First Nation</li> <li>• Stoney Nakoda Nations (Chiniki)</li> <li>• Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation</li> <li>• University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'l nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills</li> <li>• First Nation – Outside of Alberta</li> </ul>

# Appendix B: Community Archives

Figure B1. Question 9: Does your community have archives?

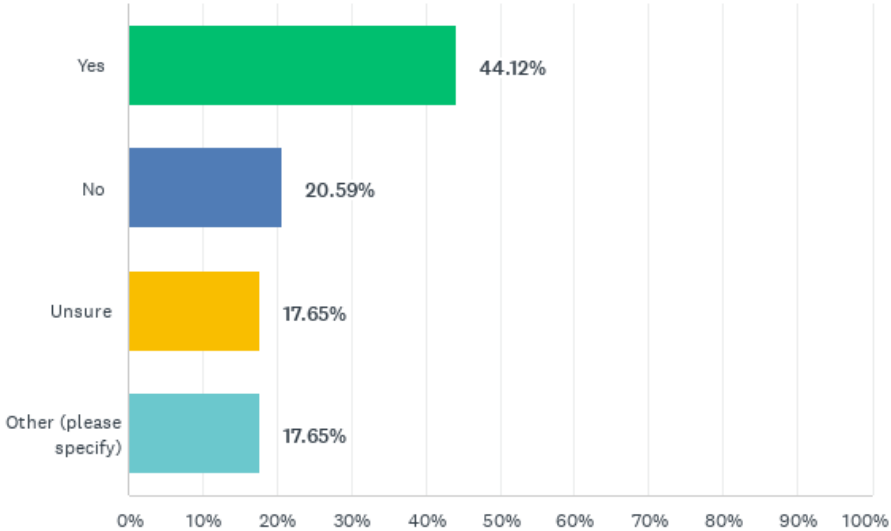


Figure B2. Question 10: How would you classify your archives or recordkeeping activities? (Please select all that apply)

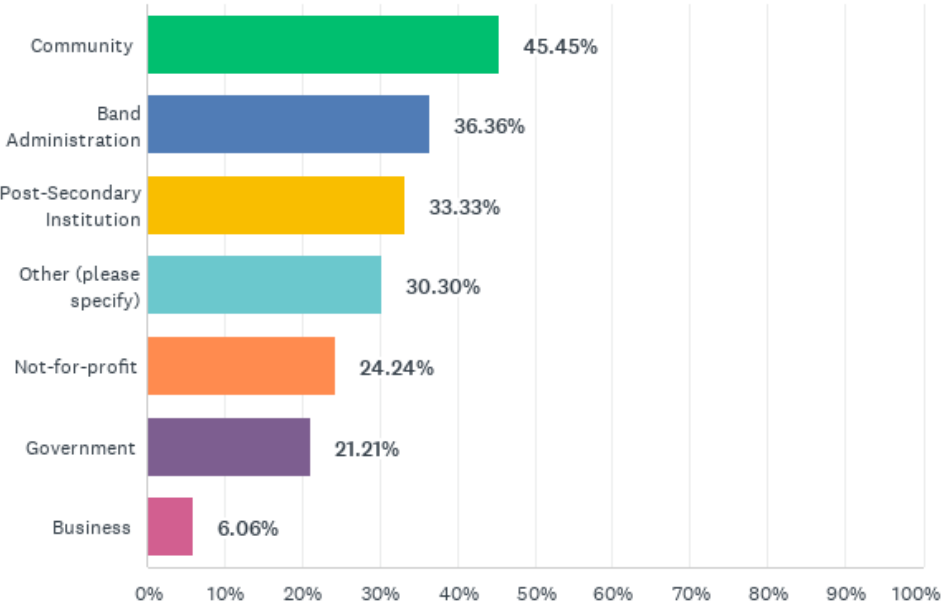
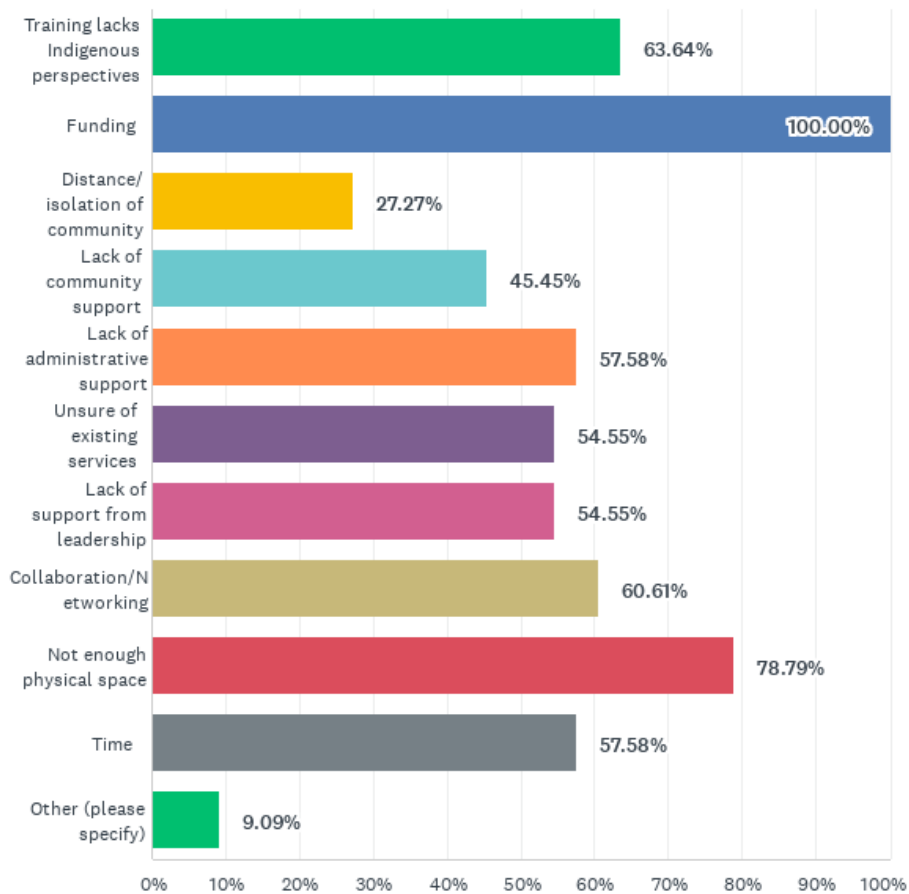


Figure B3. Question 12: What is the scope of records your community is focused on collecting? (Word cloud of common phrases in responses)



Figure B4. Question 19: What barriers do you experience to developing an archival program for your community?



# Appendix C: Training and Capacity Development

Figure C1. Question 21: We recognize that you have many needs when it comes to Capacity Development, could you please rank the following by their level of importance?

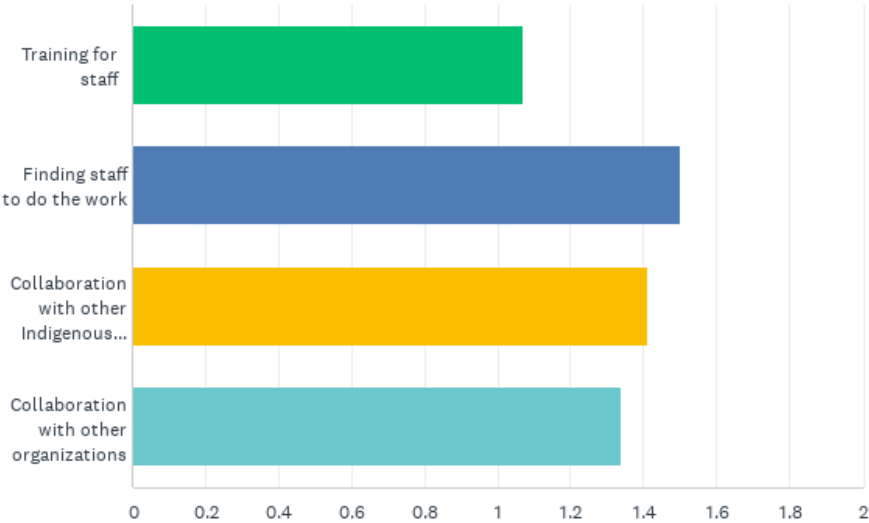


Figure C2. Question 28: What types of training or workshops would help you feel supported to do this work? (Please select all that apply)

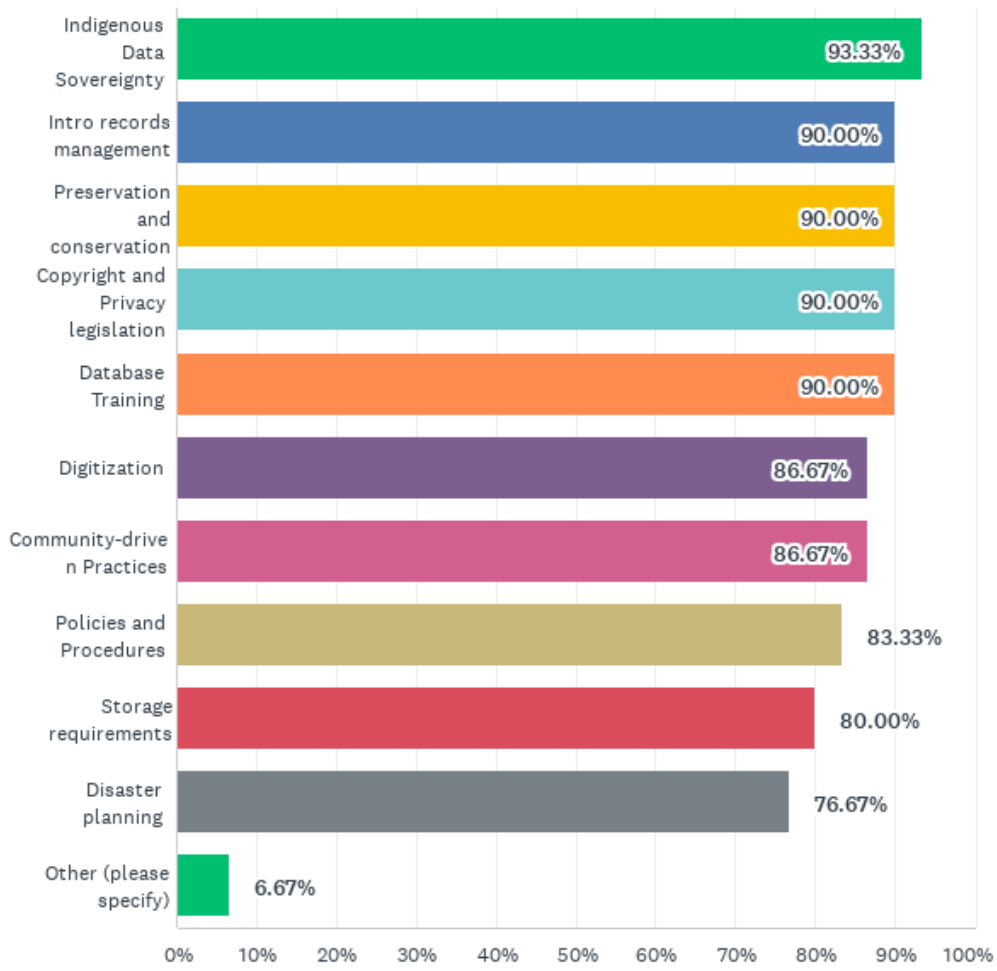
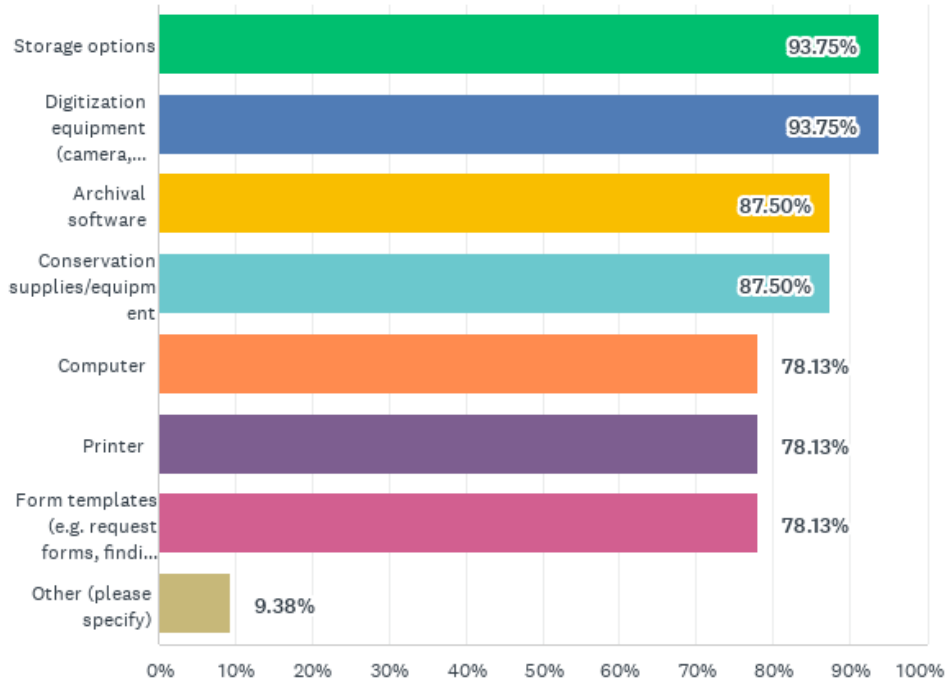


Figure C3. Question 29: What equipment or tools do you require to be successful in this type of work? (Please select all that apply)



## Appendix D: Accessing Archives

Figure D1. Question 24: What recommendations do you have for non-Indigenous archival institutions to better serve your community or organization? What are some steps to reduce barriers to access? Please tell us in the space below: (Word cloud of common phrases in responses)



Table D1. Summary of Quotes from Question 24.

<b>Question 24: Survey Respondent Quotes</b>
<p>“Museums and archives in Alberta do not take a proactive approach to letting First Nations communities known that they have items from those [communities]”</p> <p>“First Nations need to know what items exist in the first place and where items or digitized materials can be accessed.”</p> <p>“There needs to be a better desire in these organizations [non-Indigenous] and in the people who work there to start picking up the phone and calling First Nations communities to tell them they have items from there and start building that relationship.”</p> <p>“[T]alk to our archivist, collaborate”</p> <p>“Be a voice for funding options, sharing grant resources, etc.”</p> <p>“Collaborate”</p> <p>“Collaborate in a good way”</p> <p>“Let Indigenous communities have access to what is important to them.”</p>

“Work with communities, teach this way.”

“Lift some restrictions”

“Communication, partnership building, intermediate agreements.”

“To be willing & ready to open up to collaborate and share information, to be respectful.”

“Understanding history and [that we are] still in treaty.”

“Listening to Indigenous voices.”

“To release our communities archival materials without hesitation or denial to [our] records.”

“No gatekeeping. I experienced this during my research.”

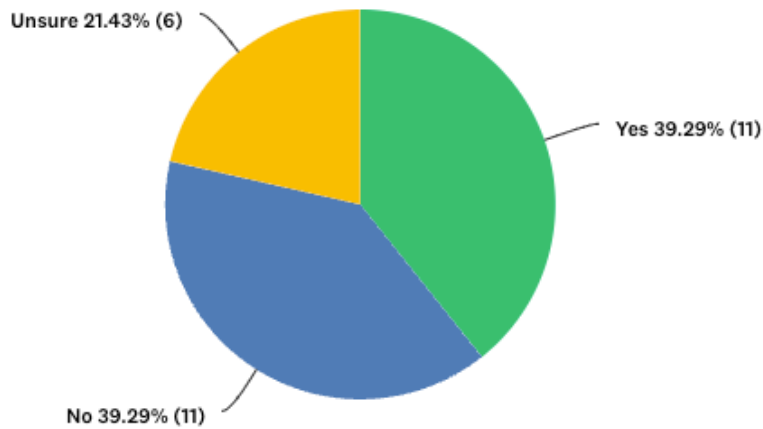
“Acknowledging that certain practices were detrimental to Indigenous communities and contributed to social malaise, dysfunction and poverty.”

“Act on good faith and good intentions.”

“Nothing about us without us.”

“Honour the artefacts that were stolen from First Nations groups and give them back to the nations.”

Figure D2. Question 25: Have non-Indigenous (public) institutions contacted you?



## Appendix E: Survey Questions

### ASA Indigenous Archives Survey 2024

#### About this Survey

The Archives Society of Alberta (ASA) is a professional association for archives and archivists with nearly 200 members. We support the development of archival professionals and organizations that meet the needs of their communities. We offer a range of professional development opportunities and are working towards supporting the archives of Alberta's Indigenous communities through the Indigenous Needs Assessment survey project.

This survey aims to determine the recordkeeping and records access needs of Indigenous communities in Alberta. This project builds on ASA's current advising services, and responses from this survey will inform the development of future programs, a wider range of services and ongoing learning opportunities. This survey is an opportunity to share your wish list for archives and programming for your community so we can collectively work towards your community, or organization's needs. We thank you for your time and contribution to the Indigenous Needs Assessment survey.

Please note: This survey collects contact and demographic information; survey responses will be anonymized and analyzed for the Needs Assessment report. Please provide your contact information so that the ASA can contact you for your input on survey results, and future communications regarding the Indigenous Archives Project.

1. Organization Name
2. Organization Name and Email Address
3. Contact Phone Number
4. What is your first name?
5. What is your last name?
6. What is your primary job title or role?
7. Do you wish to self-identify as Indigenous? If yes, please indicate which category best fits.
  - First Nations
  - Inuit
  - Métis
  - Non-Status
  - Status
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other (please specify)
8. Could you please indicate your community's name or affiliation in the space below:
9. Does your community or organization have archives?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Unsure
  - Other
10. How would you classify your archives or recordkeeping activities? (Please select all that apply):
  - Band Administration
  - Business
  - Government
  - Not-for-profit
  - Community
  - Post-Secondary Institution
  - Other (please specify)
11. What media types do you have in your archives or records? (Please select all that apply)
  - Textual recordings

- Sound recordings
- Digital records (born-digital materials)
- Large scale printed materials (maps, traditional land use aids, posters, architectural drawings)
- Photographic materials
- Video recordings/moving images
- Microform
- Objects
- Digitized materials
- Other (please specify)

12. What is the scope of material your community or organization is focused on collecting? Please tell us about your acquisition parameters:

13. Do you have a dedicated space or location to house archival materials?

- Yes
- No
- Other

14. If no, are you planning to create a space or develop an archive? Please explain:

15. If yes, please describe where your records are kept (i.e. storage room, cabinet, boxes)

16. Do you have any concerns about your existing archival storage space?

17. Please tell us which audience uses your archives and records regularly? (Please select all that apply)

- Administrative staff
- Archivist
- Librarian
- Educators
- Academic researchers
- Community researchers
- Lawyers
- Journalists
- Community/Nation members
- Youth (K-12)
- Other (please specify)

18. What is your dream archives space? What would serve your community better and meet the needs of your archival programming? (e.g. reading room, multi-uses space, climate control?)

19. What are some of the barriers you experience to developing an archival program for your community? (Please select all that apply.)

- Training lacks cultural or Indigenous perspectives
- Funding
- Distance and isolation of community
- Lack of support from community
- Lack of program administration
- Unsure of existing services
- Lack of support from leadership
- Collaboration between community departments
- Not enough physical space
- Time
- Other (please specify)

20. Preservation Practices: We recognize that you have many needs when it comes to preservation practices. Could you please rank the following factors by level of current importance for preservation practices?

	<b>Most Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Somewhat Unimportant</b>	<b>Least Important</b>
Meeting professional archival standards					
Implementing archival software					
Developing community-specific classification systems					
Collection assessment practices					

21. Capacity development: We recognize that you have many needs when it comes to capacity development. Could you please rank the following factors by level of current importance for preservation practices?

	<b>Most Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Somewhat Unimportant</b>	<b>Least Important</b>
Training for staff					
Finding staff to do the work					
Collaborating with other Indigenous communities					
Collaborating with other archival organizations					

22. Does your community or organization have partnerships with any of the following to support your archival development? (Please select all that apply):

- Other Indigenous communities
- Other Archives
- Local Museum
- Local Library
- University
- Other (Please specify)

23. Do you have any experience accessing non-Indigenous archives (i.e. Provincial, University, local archives?)

- Yes
- No
- If you would like to comment on your experience(s) please use the space below:

24. The Archives Society of Alberta recognizes that archival institutions which hold collections need to be committed to Truth and Reconciliation and building relationships with Indigenous communities. What recommendations do you have for non-Indigenous archival institutions to better serve your community or organization? What are some steps to reduce barriers to access? Please tell us in the space below:

25. Have you been contacted by any non-Indigenous archival institutions or local archives to be involved with archival work related to your community?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

26. If yes please tell us what your experience has been like in the space below:

27. How would you describe your training or experience level with archival work?

- No previous training
- Some training
- Professional training
- Education in another field
- Prefer not to say

28. What types of training or workshops would help you to feel supported to do this archival work? (Please select all that apply)

- Introductory records management practices
- Digitization
- Preservation and conservation standards
- Disaster planning
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty
- Copyright and privacy legislation
- Developing policies and procedures
- Community-driven archival practices
- Storage requirements
- Archival database training
- Other (please specify)

29. What equipment or tools do you require to be successful in this work? (Please select all that apply)

- Archival software
- Storage options
- Digitization equipment (camera, scanner, etc.)
- Conservation supplies/equipment
- Computer
- Printer
- Form templates (e.g. request forms, findings aids, etc.)
- Other (please specify)

30. Do you think any of your community members would be interested in pursuing archival studies as a profession?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- Other (please specify)

31. How could the archival community be more appealing to communities and/or youth?

32. Please share any other comments you have:

Thank you!

We want to express our gratitude for your participation in our survey! Your feedback is valuable in shaping our future decisions and how we can continue to support Indigenous Archives in Alberta. Thank you for your valuable input!

- Archives Society of Alberta