



COUNCIL OF NOVA SCOTIA ARCHIVES

Reconciliation Working Group Report

Draft for public feedback

2022

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Introduction

Founded in 1983, the Council of Nova Scotia Archives (CNSA) is a professional association for archives and archivists in Nova Scotia. The Council advocates for the proper preservation of archives and the importance of public access to these records through its member archives. As of the writing of this report, **the CNSA has over 110 members**, more than 75 of which are institutions – archives and heritage organizations of all sizes across the province.

The Council of Nova Scotia Archives' Reconciliation Working Group (RWG) was established on September 18, 2020, in response to the release of a draft of "A Reconciliation Framework for Canadian Archives" (hereafter referred to as "the Framework") by the [Steering Committee on Canada's Archives](#) (SCCA) in July 2020. The [final version of the Reconciliation Framework](#) was released in March 2022. The RWG was tasked with determining what actions the CNSA should take to assist members with implementing the SCCA's Framework and forwarding reconciliation within the Council and its membership.

The Reconciliation Framework is a **call to action for archives and archivists in Canada**. The problems faced by the CNSA and its members are not specific to Nova Scotia: as stated in the Framework, archival practice in Canada (and elsewhere) is grounded in colonial values and worldviews. Our members are not to blame for establishing practices that neglect Indigenous voices, but now that we see the problems, **we are responsible for change**. Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its report in 2015, several CNSA members have taken the initiative to build relationships with Mi'kmaw communities and have made strides to decolonize their practices and holdings. We applaud all the work our members have done and are doing. But as the Framework shows, there is still much work we need to do. The RWG hopes the CNSA can help its members on this journey and be a vehicle for change within archives and archival practice in Nova Scotia and Mi'kma'ki.

This draft of the RWG Report is a condensed version of what was submitted to the CNSA Executive on March 18, 2022. We would like our recommendations to reflect the needs and priorities of all those invested in the future of archival practice in this region. We therefore are **circulating this draft for public feedback, especially from CNSA members and Mi'kmaq**.

Important Note

While this report was written in response to the Framework and the need for reconciliation between settler/colonial archives and Indigenous Peoples in Canada, many of our recommendations can and should be extended to other historically marginalized communities in Nova Scotia such as Black/African Nova Scotians, LGBTQIA2S+, immigrants, those with disabilities, and so forth. We encourage readers to reflect upon how the CNSA's planned actions could be broadened to forward diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in addition to reconciliation within the CNSA, its membership, Nova Scotia, and Mi'kma'ki.

Summary of the Framework

The Reconciliation Framework responds to the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's **Call to Action #70**: "We call upon the federal government to provide funding to the Canadian Association of Archivists to undertake, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of archival policies and best practices," and produce a report with recommendations as "a reconciliation framework for Canadian Archives."

The Framework acknowledges the historic and ongoing roles that archival institutions have played in Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada, particularly the appropriation and colonization of Indigenous knowledge and records. The Framework affirms



The Framework calls for substantial revisions to Canadian archival policy to respect and support Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights to records, knowledge, and information by and about them

Canadian archivists' commitment to reconciliation with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities, and to building meaningful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples as the foundation for all future reconciliation work.

Recognizing the Euro-centric and colonial assumptions inherent in current archival theory and practice, the Framework calls for substantial revisions to Canadian archival policy to respect and support Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights to records, knowledge, and information by and about them. The Framework identifies core objectives for change to incorporate the priorities, perspectives, and practices of Indigenous communities into archival policy, governance, professional practices, resource allocation, and education.

Building meaningful and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous

Peoples and Canada's archival community is the first and the most important objective for change. The Framework acknowledges that steps toward reconciliation on the part of the archival community must originate in, and be responsive to, the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities and organizations. The principles of **respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity should guide archival institutions** seeking to build trust with relevant Inuit, Métis, and First Nations communities, groups, and individuals. A commitment to relationship-building is reflected in the Framework's recommendation that partnerships with Indigenous communities be formally incorporated into the governance and management structures of archival institutions.

The Framework also addresses other areas of Canadian archival theory and practice that must be revised to work toward reconciliation. Existing standards of professional practice, including the handling of archival materials pertaining to Indigenous histories and cultures, conventions of arrangement & description, and policies around ownership, control, access, and possession must change to reflect **Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights over their records and information**, as well as Indigenous protocols for preserving history and community knowledge. The Framework identifies Canadian archival education programs as important sites for supporting this paradigm shift within professional practice and for challenging the colonial assumptions embedded in existing archival theory and practices. Finally, facilitating Indigenous Peoples' access to their records is identified as a priority area for change: beginning from the assumption that Indigenous people have a "right to know about and control access to archival materials created by or about them" (SCCA 2022, 44), the Framework calls institutions to inventory their holdings, inform Indigenous communities about the existence of relevant archival materials, as well as their rights to access – and potentially control others' access to – those materials.



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To summarize, the Framework asks the Canadian archival community to:

1 **Build equitable relationships with Indigenous communities**

Before true reconciliation can begin, Canada's archival community needs to build equitable relationships with Indigenous communities that are grounded in respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity

2 **Respect & reflect Indigenous sovereignty over their information**

Existing standards of archival professional practice must change to reflect Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty over information and knowledge by and about them as well as Indigenous protocols for preserving history and community knowledge

3 **Respond to the needs & priorities of Indigenous communities**

Any steps taken by the archival community toward reconciliation must originate in, and be responsive to, the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities and organizations, not just the needs and priorities of archives and/or their parent organizations.

4 **Make significant changes to archival practice**

Current archival practices and standards may require a complete paradigm shift in order to achieve the above recommendations

5 **View reconciliation as an ongoing process**

Reconciliation is not an end-goal nor is it a box to be checked; it also may never be 'complete.' Instead, reconciliation should be viewed as an ongoing process that is – and must be – responsive to the needs and relationships out of which it grows

Potential Challenges

Based on the RWG's survey of CNSA members, it is evident that the membership would like to build relationships with Mi'kmaq communities and learn more about what reconciliation means for archives. While a hopeful sign, we know that many CNSA member organizations have finite resources and operate with limited staff, both paid and volunteer. We also know that for most of our members, their resources – financial and human – have been further restricted by the pandemic. Outreach is already an under-resourced part of archival practice in Nova Scotia and elsewhere, with archivists allocated insufficient time to build and sustain relationships with communities and organizations. As a result, even archives with sizeable staff and budgets would struggle to find the time and resources required to implement the Framework; without sufficient support, it may be an impossible task for most CNSA members.

The RWG believes that many CNSA members will face **two fundamental challenges** in attempting to implement the Framework's recommendations: relationship-building with Mi'kmaq and accessing meaningful and relevant education about Mi'kmaq histories, culture, and protocols. What's more, learning about the Mi'kmaq ideally should grow from reciprocal, respectful relationships with them. How archives should

navigate these inter-connected needs – relationship-building and education about Indigenous cultures and protocols – are not mapped out in the Framework.

As a non-governmental organization, the RWG believes that the CNSA is uniquely qualified to help advocate for and facilitate some of what the Framework calls for, especially **education and training** that will help members build capacity for respectful, reciprocal relationship-building with Mi'kmaq. Additionally, given that the CNSA offers advisory services, it already has many of the tools needed to provide guidance and support to members that want to implement the most important recommendations in the Framework.

“

The CNSA [can] help members build capacity for respectful, reciprocal relationship-building with Mi'kmaq

But before the CNSA can become a vehicle of change, it must make changes within the Council itself. The Council should make reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion (REDI) part of its mandate. Just as the CNSA sees itself as a responsive organization that works to meet the needs of its members, the CNSA must commit to constantly adjusting and working towards reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The CNSA must also actively seek to diversify. **Mi'kmaq are integral to the future of archival practice in this region** (as are African Nova Scotians and other historically marginalized communities). We must give Mi'kmaq seats at our table and be open to changing in response to their values, priorities, and needs.

That being said, the RWG's biggest challenge in writing this report is that **the CNSA lacks information about Mi'kmaw priorities and needs for heritage preservation and stewardship**. The RWG sought counsel from Mi'kmaw colleagues and friends, and we discussed possible avenues for consultation with Mi'kmaq. In so doing, it became clear to us that the time and human resources required to better understand the needs of Mi'kmaw heritage organizations and communities – and how the CNSA must change in order to be an ally – was well beyond the scope of the RWG's Terms of Reference. Moreover, the RWG believes that **listening to and learning from Mi'kmaq is part of the CNSA's reconciliation journey**. That journey must begin with the CNSA building reciprocal relationships with Mi'kmaq, by earning their trust, respect, and guidance. Relationship-building should be seen as an ongoing, collaborative process and an investment in the future of the CNSA, its members, and archival practice in this region. It may also allow the CNSA to be a conduit for fostering relationships between CNSA members and Mi'kmaw organizations, communities, and Elders that share an interest in preserving and promoting culture and heritage.

We hope that this report and our recommendations will help the CNSA move toward truth, reconciliation, and more equitably serving those who preserve and promote the documentary heritage of this region.



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Streams of Action

The RWG is recommending that the CNSA undertake three streams of action: Relationship-Building, Education, and Engagement.

These three streams reflect the needs identified by CNSA members and address the challenges we anticipate members will face in implementing the Framework. The streams also reflect the Framework's primary objective: relationship-building with Indigenous Peoples should be the focus of archives and archivists, the outcomes of which *must equally benefit Mi'kmaw communities*. Therefore, **building meaningful and reciprocal relationships with Mi'kmaq should be at the heart of all of the CNSA's intentions and actions**. Education and Engagement will support Relationship-Building and be a product of it.

The three streams are interrelated and interconnected, and together, will help the CNSA and its members move toward reconciliation.



EDUCATION

for CNSA members

- Mi'kmaw history, culture, & worldviews
- Respecting Mi'kmaw protocols & governance
- Honouring the Treaties
- Cultural sensitivity training
- The TRC's findings and Calls to Action
- OCAP™ & UNDRIP
- Decolonizing archival practices
- Implementing the Framework



ENGAGEMENT

with Mi'kmaq

- Listen to Mi'kmaw priorities & needs
- Collaborate with Mi'kmaw organizations & communities
- Offer archival training & information
- Direct CNSA resources toward Mi'kmaw initiatives
- Support Mi'kmaw stewardship of their heritage

Respectful
Relevant
Reciprocal
Responsible

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



Recommendations

The RWG is also recommending that the CNSA take a **phased approach** with the three streams of action – Relationship-Building, Education, and Engagement. Each phase will build on earlier phases and will inform next steps. A phased approach will provide a **foundation of support, information, and resources** that will result in long-lasting and meaningful changes. In order to avoid challenges mentioned earlier in this report, the RWG is recommending that these phases be implemented slowly and thoughtfully to support consciousness-raising, relationship building, and adapting as the CNSA learns more about Mi'kmaq priorities and needs. Moreover, a measured and thoughtful approach will help avoid burdening Mi'kmaq communities, organizations, and individuals; instead, responsibility will be placed on the CNSA and its members to earn the trust of Mi'kmaq. Hopefully from that trust, the CNSA and members can build respectful, reciprocal relationships with Mi'kmaq communities and organizations, out of which, truth and reconciliation will grow.

These recommendations are not a prescription for reconciliation. Rather, guided by the Framework, they are simply a starting point for the CNSA on the path to respectful, reciprocal relationship-building with Mi'kmaq and to change. As relationship-building unfolds and the CNSA learns more about Mi'kmaq priorities and needs, these recommendations will likely need to shift and grow.

For the CNSA Executive

- 1 Write a statement that (hopefully) will become part of the CNSA's mandate, declaring the Council's commitment to reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- 2 Write a meaningful land acknowledgement and make it clearly visible on the CNSA website.
- 3 Commit to supporting and promoting Indigenous rights to protect and control access to their traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, and information by and about them.
- 4 Create a Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) standing committee. The Chair of this committee should be cross-appointed to the CNSA Executive as the new member-at-large for REDI. At least one member of the REDI Committee should also sit on the Education Committee.
- 5 Seek to diversify the Executive Committee and CNSA membership.

- 6 Revise the Archives Advisor's work plan to devote time (and resources) to REDI work plus outreach and relationship-building with Mi'kmaw organizations, communities, and individuals (as with BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and more).
- 7 Commit annual financial resources to reconciliation, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives such as Mi'kmaw Elder and community consultation, REDI education for CNSA members, and REDI professional-development for CNSA staff and the Executive.
- 8 Work toward hiring an individual who identifies as Mi'kmaw, who, along with the Archives Advisor, could focus on outreach and relationship-building with Mi'kmaq and help develop and coordinate REDI education for members.

Education for CNSA Members

- 9 Through consultation with Mi'kmaw organizations, communities, and Elders, adapt the CNSA's Core Courses to acknowledge the need to decolonize/Indigenize archival practice and offer new ways of approaching arrangement, description, and access protocols.
- 10 Possibly in partnership with ANSM, offer members at least one REDI-themed workshop or learning opportunity each year to address the needs identified in the membership survey. In order of priority:
 - Mi'kmaw history and culture
 - Treaty education
 - The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings and Calls to Action
 - The Reconciliation Framework for Canadian Archives
 - Training and cultural protocols for working with Indigenous archival materials
 - Repatriating knowledge – what it is and what it means for archives
 - How to be an ally
 - Assisting researchers looking for records pertain to Mi'kmaq and/or other Indigenous Peoples
 - Resources available for reconciliation initiatives and/or Mi'kmaw history projects

Also consider offering the following workshops:

- A Blanket Exercise
 - Cultural sensitivity training
 - Archives and [OCAP™](#) (Indigenous ownership, control, access, and possession)
 - Why use land acknowledgements and how to make them meaningful
 - Protocols and best practices for relationship building with Mi'kmaq
 - Trauma-informed archival practice and access services
- 11 Provide ongoing support and advising for members that are building relationships with Mi'kmaw communities/organizations and implementing the Framework.

Engagement with Mi'kmaq

- 12 Offer free memberships to Mi'kmaw organizations and individuals that are interested or involved in heritage stewardship.
- 13 Create a bursary program for BIPOC individuals that would like to enrol in the CNSA's Archival Certificate Program, granting them reduced or free registration fees for all Core Courses and CNSA workshops.
- 14 Through relationship-building and consultation with Mi'kmaq, inquire about whether there is need or desire for any of the following actions outlined in the Framework, and how/if the CNSA could assist:
 - Locate, inventory, identify, digitize, describe, and create an online database/portal for archival documents and resources on Mi'kmaw history, individuals, and communities held in repositories across Nova Scotia. Mi'kmaq should determine access protocols for these records and materials.
 - Genealogy/archival research workshops for Mi'kmaw communities and individuals.
 - A type of 'Introduction to Archives' course for Mi'kmaw organizations/communities. Are there other courses and training the CNSA could offer/facilitate that would benefit Mi'kmaw communities?
 - A guide for culturally-appropriate terms, names, and orthographies for describing records and archival materials that pertain to Mi'kmaq. Include with this a guide for how to describe records with racist terminology.
 - A heritage-sector mentorship program for Mi'kmaw youth to help develop interest in heritage professions (perhaps in partnership with ANSM).
 - A safe-space group for BIPOC heritage professionals.
 - Protocols and cultural guidelines for CNSA members that want to engage with local Mi'kmaw communities and organizations.

Next Steps

While the RWG Report was written for the CNSA Executive, we recognize that any actions resulting from it will primarily impact CNSA members and Mi'kmaq. It is therefore important that we **gather feedback on our recommendations from CNSA members, Mi'kmaq, and the public**. You can [email us](#) your thoughts or submit them anonymously via our [online form](#).

Thank you – Wela'lin – Merci!

Reconciliation Working Group

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Resources & Links

The Framework provides many resources on reconciliation and decolonizing archives in Canada. Below are some resources specific to Mi'kma'ki/Nova Scotia that may be helpful to CNSA members on their journey toward reconciliation. This list is not comprehensive; rather, like our recommendations, it is meant as a starting point.

- Association of Nova Scotia Museums' [Resource Sheet on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- Cape Breton University's [Mi'kmaq Resource Guide](#)
- [Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq](#)
- Halifax Public Libraries' [Reconciliation Reading List](#)
- [Jilaptoq Mi'kmaw Language Center](#)
- [Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn](#) – Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative
- [Mi'gmaq-Mi'kmaq Online Talking Dictionary](#)
- [Mi'kmaq History Month](#)
- [Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum's Culture and Heritage Committee](#)
- [Mi'kmaq Resource Guide](#) by the Union of Nova Scotia Indians, the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, and the Native Council of Nova Scotia
- [Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey \(MK\)](#) – Mi'kmaq education and language emersion
- [Mi'kmaw Place Names Digital Atlas](#)
- [Native Council of Nova Scotia](#)
- [Regional Chief for Nova Scotia/Newfoundland, Chief Paul Prosper, for the Assembly of First Nations](#)
- [Tepi'ketuek Mi'kmaw Archives](#), which includes a list of History resources
- [Treaty Education](#)
- [Union of Nova Scotia Indians](#)

Archives and repositories with online guides to their Mi'kmaw holdings:

- Beaton Institute Archives, Cape Breton University, [Guide to Mi'kmaw Holdings](#)
- Halifax Municipal Archives' [guide to sources related to Mi'kmaq in Halifax region](#)
- [Membertou Heritage Park virtual archives](#)
- [Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre's Archives](#)
- [Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre](#)
- Nova Scotia Archives' [Mi'kmaq Holdings Resource Guide](#) and the digitized [Treaties of Peace and Friendship](#)
- Nova Scotia Museums' [Mi'kmaq Portrait Gallery](#)