**AAO**

Archives Association of Ontario

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# Ontario Archival Accessions Register: FAQ

## What is the Ontario Archival Accessions Register (OAAR)?

OAAR is a new online register of accessions to archival institutions in Ontario.  It has been developed in conjunction with the Provincial Acquisition Strategy to provide a common place for Ontario archives to share basic information on the new records they have received in the previous year.  Unlike Archeion, the Archives Association of Ontario's (AAO) database of completed archival descriptions, OAAR is intended to capture brief details on newly acquired records at the point of acquisition, before processing has taken place.

It is up to individual institutions to determine the point at which they consider records to have been "acquired" for reporting purposes, but usually this follows a formal transfer of ownership.

## Who can contribute to the OAAR?

All institutions collecting archival records in the Province of Ontario are welcome and encouraged to contribute information on their accessions to the OAAR.

## Why should I contribute to the OAAR?

The OAAR is intended to benefit both individual institutions and the archival community in Ontario as a whole. There are several reasons why every archives in the province should contribute to the OAAR:

- It will help foster a spirit of openness and transparency amongst archives, allowing the archival community to more easily share accessions information and evaluate how the Provincial Acquisition

Strategy is being implemented in practice through comparison of collection mandates and acquisitions.

- It will help researchers by providing timely information on newly acquired records during the inevitable time lapse between accessioning and comprehensive processing and description in Archeion.

- It will be a useful tool to help the Ontario archival community with outreach and promotional activities.  For example, during Archives Awareness Week each year the AAO will be able to report on the total extent of archival accessions in the province (a statistic impossible to calculate otherwise). The OAAR can also be used to find noteworthy accessions of particular significance which can be used to publicize the important work archives do.

- It will give the Ontario archival community the ability to analyze collecting patterns/trends and to identify gaps in our collective holdings.  Ultimately, this ability will help us as we move toward a documentation strategy for Ontario that ensures our archives, taken as a whole, reflect the province's regions and people in all of their diversity.

## What information is collected for the OAAR?

The OAAR is intended to capture only the most basic and essential details of newly acquired records.  This information includes: the name of the record creator(s), a brief description of the accession, approximate covering dates, relevant subject headings (chosen from a pick-list based on Archeion subject headings), reference code or accession number (if applicable), extent of the material, whether the accession is an addition to an existing collection/fonds (accrual), and if so, whether the collection/fonds has an existing description in Archeion. A sample of this spreadsheet has been set up for reference purposes.

Institutions are encouraged to report all accessions for inclusion in the OAAR, whether the creator of the records is a corporate body, a family, or an individual, and whether the records are public/government or private. An

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archives may wish to report aggregate accession data for records from their host institution, where the creator is presumed to be a single corporate or public body. For example, a municipal archives might simply report the total extent and covering dates of records received from its municipality in a given year, rather than separate entries for various municipal departments etc. Unique collections/fonds received from external record creators, on the other hand, would warrant separate entries.

## How and when do I submit information on accessions to the OAAR?

The OAAR is based on an annual survey of archival accessions.  At the end of each calendar year invitations will be sent to every archival institution in Ontario asking for information on records acquired that year.  These invitations, which will normally be sent via email, will include a reporting template in the form of a simple Excel spreadsheet. A sample of this spreadsheet has been set up for reference purposes. Once the spreadsheet has been completed, archives will return a copy of the file to the AAO Institutional Development Committee (chairs@aao-archivists.ca) by February 28th of the following year. The collected data will then be processed for inclusion in the online OAAR by the next Archives Awareness Week (early April).

## How will the OAAR be presented to the public?

The OAAR will be located on a dedicated page of the Archives Association of Ontario's website. Archivists and researchers will be able to browse the accessions information by accession year, name of the archival institution, and by the subject headings identified in the reporting spreadsheet.

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## Won't this mean more work? How will I find the time to contribute?

The reporting template will be permanently available on the AAO's website. This means archival institutions can download a copy and update it as and when accessions are received throughout the year, rather than compiling the information retrospectively all at once. Because the details requested are brief and fairly high-level, it shouldn't be too onerous to fill out a line of the spreadsheet following each accession. For some institutions without descriptive systems in place, the OAAR reporting template might even be a useful tool to establish and maintain basic control over archival holdings.

## Won't this information cause researchers to contact my archives before the records are available for public use?

The webpage where the OAAR is hosted will include a clear warning to researchers about the preliminary nature of the information provided and the need to enquire with archival institutions regarding access before planning any visits.

Of course it is up to each institution to set policies on access to unprocessed records.  Some archives may allow researchers to consult newly acquired records before processing, while others might advise the researcher to wait but use such requests to help prioritize processing efforts. Ultimately, the reason we keep archives is to make them available for use, so we should encourage expressions of interest even if we aren't always able to accommodate requests for access.