



Evaluation Report on the Description of Published Heritage (2015–20)

Evaluation Function

Corporate Planning and Accountability Division

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SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the description component of the Published Heritage Program at Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

The published heritage preserved by LAC consists of documents about Canada and Canadians. It must be described in order to be discoverable, both in LAC's collection and in the collections of Canadian libraries, which use the same descriptions. The description activity is therefore an important component of the Program, as it facilitates Canadians' access to their published heritage.

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covers the period from 2015–16 to 2019–20 and examined the following:

- Effectiveness of the published heritage description process
- Achievement of performance measurement strategy results in the short and medium term
- Use of resources and adherence to service standards

Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results and Directive on Results* (2016). It is based on a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative data sources, including a literature and internal documents review, interviews with key informants, an employee survey, and analysis of financial and performance information.

Key findings

Effectiveness of the published heritage description process

In recent years, the Published Heritage Branch has undergone many changes, including the implementation of the Integrated Library Management System in 2017–18. Employees surveyed indicated that those changes have had an impact on their work and on the way information is analyzed and described.

Employees were provided with training to support them in the transition. However, the training focused only on the use of the system, not on the new processes or procedures resulting from the system's implementation. Consequently, employees relied more on their knowledge and past experience to work with the new system.

Employees surveyed also indicated that they are aware of the policy instruments on published heritage description. However, they reported that some of those instruments, such as the policies and directives, were neither up to date nor accessible, and that they could not easily refer to them when carrying out their duties.

The evaluation also revealed some of the system's limitations. For example, the system did not make it possible to recreate a bilingual environment for the authorities. Although it is a bilingual system, it does not work as well with French-language authorities. As a result, employees now use different systems to create and update English- and French-language authorities.

In addition, data was lost during the transition to the new system, resulting in incomplete descriptions.

Achievement of expected results in the short and medium term

Although published material acquisitions decreased between 2015–16 and 2019–20, the Program was unable to describe all of the acquisitions made by LAC during that period. According to Program management, the goal is not to describe all of the published heritage acquired, but to describe enough of it to make it discoverable by users. However, respondents confirmed the existence of backlogs and indicated that measures to reduce or eliminate them had been taken in recent years. The evaluation team was unable to establish the extent of the progress made in this area.

The evaluation also confirmed the need to improve the discoverability of published heritage. In addition to implementing the Integrated Library Management System, LAC launched two new online catalogues in 2018: Voilà and Aurora. The team that conducted the evaluation wanted to know whether these tools had improved access to published heritage. In the absence of user experience data, the team interviewed program employees. The latter indicated that the Aurora catalogue was more user-friendly than Voilà, gave more accurate results, and was easier to navigate. They also indicated that users had to refine their searches to find documents, which suggests that there is a need to improve the overall discoverability of published heritage (for searches in LAC catalogues and in those of other Canadian libraries).

Efficiency of the published heritage description

Employees surveyed reported that multiple descriptions can be generated in the Integrated Library Management System for the same item. In these cases, they have to select the one that best meets LAC standards and modify it as needed to complete the process. In addition, because it is an open system, sometimes other users modify descriptions created by employees. Employees then have to correct them, which affects the efficiency of the description process. They said they had more control with the old system.

Some components of published heritage description (such as pre-cataloguing and federal publications) have service standards. According to respondents, in general, the standards are being followed.

Recommendations

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the Published Heritage Description Division should:

1. Update all policy instruments (including work plans) and make them accessible to employees so that they can refer to them to do their work more effectively.
2. Update processes and procedures to improve the effectiveness of published heritage description and to adapt them to the Integrated Library Management System.
3. Explore and implement solutions to improve the discoverability of published heritage as a whole.
4. Update the plan to reduce the backlog of published heritage descriptions, including the sections related to the resources required and the mechanism for reporting progress to LAC senior management.

Management Response and Action Plan

Management's response to the recommendations and the action plan it has put forward are set out in Appendix A.

1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the description component of the Published Heritage Program at Library and Archives Canada (LAC). Conducting the evaluation was approved by the Departmental Performance Measurement and Program Evaluation Committee.

The evaluation covers the period from 2015–16 to 2019–20. It addresses the effectiveness of the description process, the achievement of the short- and medium-term results identified in the Performance Measurement Strategy, the use of resources and the adherence to service standards.

Since the Corporate Planning and Accountability Directorate's Audit Monitoring and Liaison Team conducted a review¹ of legal deposit in 2017, this activity was excluded from the evaluation. The activities of services to booksellers and libraries² were also excluded for the same reasons. The evaluation focused solely on the description of published heritage.

2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Under the *Library and Archives of Canada Act*³ and the Legal Deposit of Publications Regulations, LAC acquires materials produced by Canadian publishers, i.e., Canadian published heritage as described in the legislation. Its collection focuses on publications produced by Canadians or about Canada. These publications document the socio-cultural context and the intellectual, literary and creative achievements of Canadians.

The description activity is part of the mandate of the Published Heritage Branch.⁴ The Branch is responsible for the acquisition and description of published heritage⁵ and services to clients and partners. These activities are grouped under two separate divisions: the Acquisition Division and the Description Division.

More specifically, the Description Division has the mandate to describe published heritage in accordance with international standards in order to facilitate access for Canadians.

Program resources

Table 1 shows the financial and human resources allocated to the description component of the Published Heritage Program. It should be noted that prior to 2018, under LAC's former Program Activity Architecture, published heritage and private archives were part of the same program (i.e., the Documentary Heritage Program). With the introduction of the Treasury Board Policy on Results in 2016, and after a two-year transition period, the two programs became separate entities.

While financial resources remained fairly stable throughout the period evaluated, there were larger fluctuations in human resources. This trend is attributable to restructuring and other internal constraints.

¹ Corporate Planning and Accountability Directorate, *Review of Legal Deposit Practices*, March 2017.

² See the logic model in Appendix D.

³ <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/l-7.7/>

⁴ [Evaluation of the Access to Documentary Heritage Program](#) (December 2017).

⁵ Before April 2018, this program was part of the Program Alignment Architecture under point 2.1: Documentation of Canadian Society.

Table 1: Resources of the Published Heritage Program					
Description*	Fiscal Year				
	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
Program funding (in Canadian dollars)					
Actual expenditures	5,289,813	5,243,752	6,295,239	6,698,180	5,427,821
Total LAC expenditures	91,451,612	114,500,637	127,416,749	124,630,164	134,354,195
Program expenditures as a percentage of total LAC expenditures	5.78%	4.58%	4.94%	5.37%	4.04%
Human resources (full-time equivalents—FTEs)					
Actual FTEs	73	62	42	61	62

* Expenditures include salaries and other operating costs.

Source: Financial Services and Procurement Branch, Library and Archives Canada.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with Treasury Board's Policy on Results⁶ and Directive on Results⁷ (2016). It is based on a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative data sources, including a literature and internal documents review, interviews with key informants, an employee survey, and analysis of financial and performance information (see Appendix B for the methodology).

To mitigate the shortage of performance data,⁸ the evaluation team triangulated data from interviews, the survey, and the literature and internal documents review.

4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Effectiveness of the published heritage description process

Finding 1: Implementation of the Integrated Library Management System has been challenging, impacting the work of employees and contributing to a slowdown in the published heritage description process.

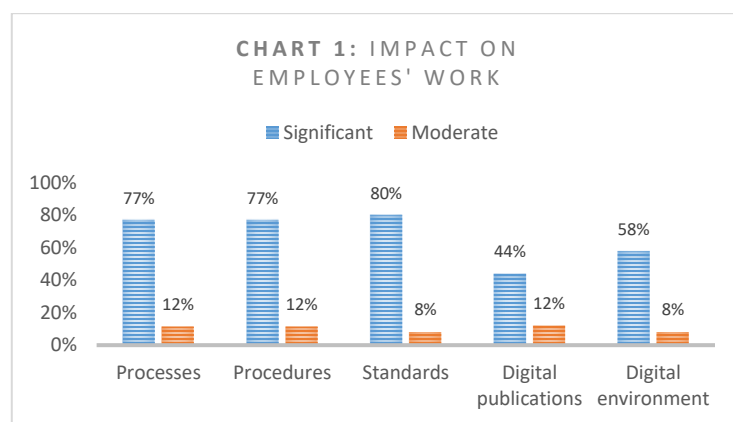
The Published Heritage Branch underwent many changes during the implementation of the Integrated Library Management System, which contributed to a slowdown in the description process. According to Program management, other factors also contributed to the slowdown, including downsizing, the time required to train employees to do the new descriptions, and the transfer of employees to other functions.

Employees surveyed reported that they received training in using the system. However, they noted that the description processes and procedures were not updated after the system was implemented, and that this had a significant impact on their work (see Chart 1). They indicated that they relied more on their knowledge and past experience to perform their duties.

⁶ Policy on Results: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=31300

⁷ Directive on Results: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=31306

⁸ For the indicators mentioned in the Program's performance measurement strategy.



Source: Published Heritage Employee Survey, January 27 to February 21, 2020.

Respondents also pointed out that some data was lost during the transition from the old system⁹ to the new one. As a result, some descriptions are incomplete. In addition, multiple descriptions are created in the system for the same item, since the system uses an open platform in which various users can modify descriptions. Employees must therefore select the description that best meets the standards¹⁰ and then modify it as necessary to complete the process. This adds to their workload. The evaluation was unable to determine whether this situation persists.

The evaluation also revealed that the system does not replicate the bilingual published heritage environment, as was the case in the old system. Accordingly, the English and French subject headings¹¹ are now created and updated in three different systems,¹² which complicates and slows the work of employees.

Finding 2: Employees are aware of existing policy instruments, but those instruments are incomplete and out of date.

A review of internal documents revealed that in 2016–17, a working group¹³ identified significant policy gaps. To address this, LAC created, among other things, its Policy on Collection Development for Published Heritage. Nevertheless, the employees surveyed confirmed that some policies and directives remain incomplete and out of date.

Chart 2 shows that, in general, the employees surveyed are aware of and understand the existing policies, directives and standards. However, they are less familiar with the procedures they need to apply in their day-to-day work.

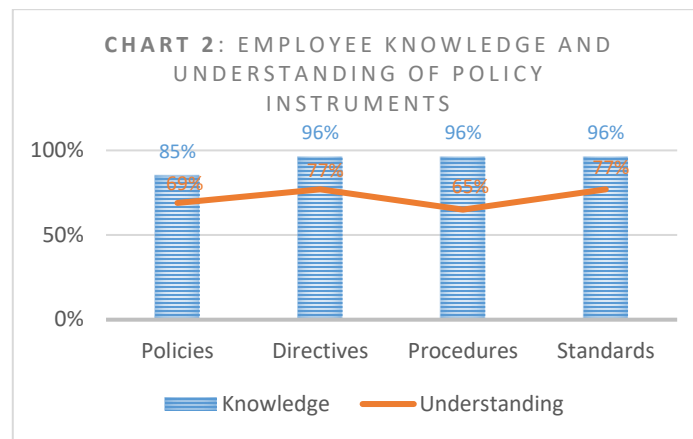
⁹ The old system used by LAC was called AMICUS.

¹⁰ RDA (Resource Description and Access) is an international description standard to which LAC adheres.

¹¹ Subject headings are keywords used to find publications in the LAC collection.

¹² For English subject headings: Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Canadian Subject Headings (CSG); for French subject headings: Répertoire de vedettes-matières (Canadiana).

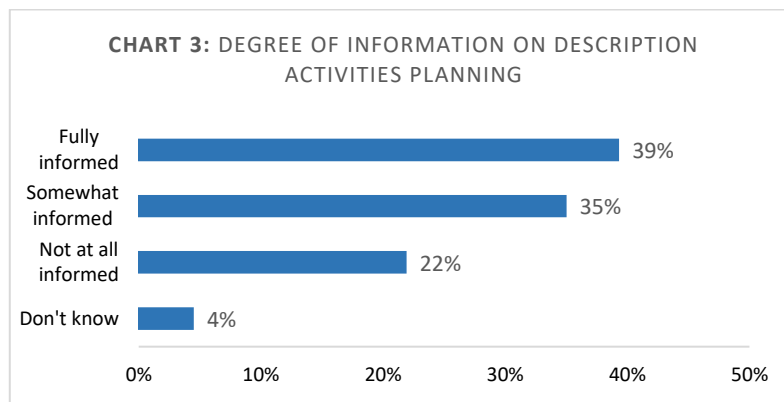
¹³ This working group was composed of members of the Acquisition Division and the Strategic Research and Policy team.



Source: Published Heritage Employee Survey, January 27 to February 21, 2020.

Finding 3: The Published Heritage Description Division uses practices to prioritize tasks and execute work plans. However, those plans and their implementation are not always communicated to employees.

The evaluation shows that the containers of items to be described clearly indicated the priority ratings and levels of description required, based on specific criteria, and that employees had access to this information to do their jobs. However, according to Chart 3, only 39.1% of employees surveyed indicated that they were fully informed of the existence of the work plans. The majority (56.5%) were either not informed or somewhat informed. In addition, 78% of employees reported that they were not aware of the implementation of the work plans.



Source: Published Heritage Employee Survey, January 27 to February 21, 2020.

4.2 Achievement of expected short-term results

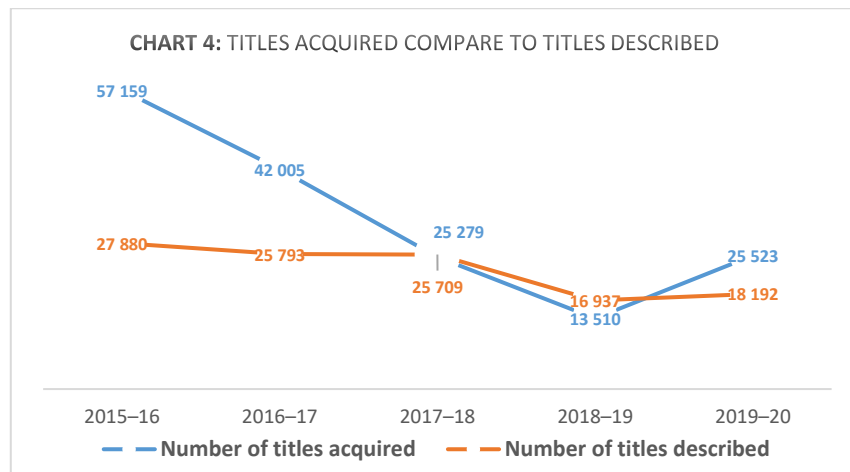
4.2.1 Description of published heritage

Finding 4: There are still backlogs in the description of published heritage.

During the interviews, the majority of respondents mentioned the existence of backlogs in the description of published heritage. The evaluation team sought to validate this information and to determine the actions taken by Program management to reduce or eliminate those.

The internal documentation review confirmed the existence of these backlogs, which have been accumulating for several years (including the years covered by the evaluation). For example, an internal document entitled *Clearing the chute* describes backlogs that include monographs, microfiche and serials.

Data analysis for the period covered by the evaluation (Chart 4) shows a decline in both the number of titles acquired and the number of titles described in the two years prior to the implementation of the new system in 2017–18. This decline was even steeper the following year, and was followed by an increase in 2019–20.



Source: Published heritage performance measurement data, 2015–16 to 2019–20.

The increase is more pronounced for acquisition activities (89%) than for description activities (7.4%). Program management indicated that the Division had described a larger number of published documents, despite a reduction of staff assigned to this activity. For example, in January and February 2020, 3,834 descriptions were completed, compared to 2,415 during the same period in 2019.

The literature review reveals that the accumulation of backlogs is a common occurrence in all libraries. The challenge is to keep such backlogs to the lowest possible level. According to Program management, the goal is not to describe everything in detail but to describe it sufficiently so that the documentary heritage becomes discoverable by users. The fact remains, however, that backlogs hinder Canadians’ access to their published heritage.

Respondents indicated that Program management had taken steps to reduce or eliminate the backlogs. This was confirmed by the internal documentation review, which indicated that various plans to that effect had been developed, including timelines and resources.

For example, the Strategic Plan for Managing Backlogs in Processing and Describing LAC Collections (January 2017) mentioned the Sector Backlogs Committee’s commitment to: “propose, by the end of March 2017, a multi-year plan to enable LAC to significantly reduce or eliminate its backlog of unprocessed and undescribed acquisitions in order to contribute directly to institutional strategic directions for access to collections.” However, the evaluation was unable to determine whether the Plan had been implemented or what progress had been made, since no data on the subject had been collected.

Interviews with employees identified possible solutions for reducing or eliminating the backlogs. In their view, it would be necessary to:

- Make a clear decision on the level of description required (full, basic, minimal and abbreviated), based on priorities, and suggest levels of description other than “full” where appropriate

- Eliminate redundant and unnecessary tasks, including the numerous processes that cut into the time spent on description (e.g., preparing boxes and labels, writing the book title and call number out by hand when the call number is already on the book)

4.3 Enhance the discoverability of documentary heritage

Finding 5: The discoverability of published heritage in the Voilà and Aurora catalogues needs to be improved.

In parallel with the implementation of the system, LAC launched the Voilà¹⁴ and Aurora¹⁵ catalogues so that users could search for published heritage in its collection and in the collections of Canadian libraries.

The team that conducted the evaluation wanted to know whether these tools had improved access to published heritage. In the absence of user experience data, the team interviewed employees. The latter indicated that the Aurora catalogue was more user-friendly than Voilà, gave more accurate results, and was easier to navigate. They also indicated that users needed to refine their searches to find documents, which suggests that there is a need to improve the overall discoverability of published heritage (for searches in LAC catalogues and in those of other Canadian libraries).

4.4 Efficiency

Finding 6: Removing redundant or unnecessary tasks would improve the published heritage description process.

In its examination of efficiency, the evaluation team looked at the factors impacting the adherence to service standards and the optimal use of resources.

Survey respondents alluded to the existence of redundant or unnecessary tasks that slow down the description of published heritage. In addition, they indicated that the switch to the new system resulted in data losses that require a number of steps and manipulations to correct. In addition, employees have to write new descriptions for documents that have not been described in the proper category (e.g., catalogues of items in monograph form rather than serials), which affects productivity and wastes time.

With regards to service standards, certain components of published heritage description (such as pre-cataloguing and federal government publications) follow specific standards that, in general, according to the respondents, are well applied.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Published heritage description has undergone significant changes with the implementation of the new system. These changes have had an impact on the description process itself, as well as on its effectiveness and efficiency.

In addition, the evaluation found that the Program has not been able to fully achieve its expected results. It also highlighted that the program needs to:

¹⁴ Voilà is Canada's national union catalogue. It contains bibliographic descriptions and location information for publications held by libraries across the country, including LAC.

¹⁵ Aurora is the online catalogue that provides access to LAC's collections.

- Update its policy instruments (including work plans) and better communicate them to employees to improve the effectiveness of their description work
- Review its processes and procedures to make published heritage description more effective and adapt them to the Integrated Library Management System
- Improve the discoverability of published heritage to facilitate access for users
- Ensure that accumulated backlog of descriptions does not hinder Canadians' access to their published heritage

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the Published Heritage Description Division should:

1. Update all policy instruments (including work plans) and make them accessible to employees so that they can refer to them to do their work more effectively.
2. Update processes and procedures to improve the effectiveness of published heritage description and to adapt them to the Integrated Library Management System.
3. Explore and implement solutions to improve the discoverability of published heritage as a whole.
4. Update the plan to reduce the backlog of published heritage descriptions, including the sections related to the resources required and the mechanism for reporting progress to LAC senior management.

APPENDIX A—MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Recommendations	Management Response	Required Actions	Expected Completion Date	Lead
1. Update all policy instruments (including work plans) and make them accessible to employees so that they can refer to them to do their work more effectively.	Accepted	<p>Communicate the Division's work plan to staff</p> <p>Identify shortcomings in policies</p> <p>Propose an updating method and a timeline, and discuss it with the new national union catalogue committee when it is formed</p> <p>Update relevant policy instruments</p>	<p>November 2020</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>September 2021</p> <p>September 2022</p>	DG, Published Heritage
2. Update processes and procedures to improve the effectiveness of published heritage description and to adapt them to the Integrated Library Management System.	Accepted	<p>Conduct an inventory of current processes and procedures to determine which ones need to be updated</p> <p>Create a schedule for updates</p> <p>Complete the updates and communicate them to staff</p>	<p>December 2020</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2022</p>	DG, Published Heritage
3. Explore and implement solutions to improve the discoverability of published heritage as a whole.	Accepted	In conjunction with the Public Services Branch, discuss options for the vendor to improve the discoverability of published heritage, and for implementing these options.	March 2021	DG, Published Heritage
4. Update the plan to reduce the backlog of published heritage descriptions, including the sections related to the resources required and the mechanism for reporting progress to LAC senior management.	Accepted	Update the plan to reduce the backlog of published heritage descriptions, including the sections related to the resources required and the mechanism for reporting progress to LAC senior management.	March 2022	DG, Published Heritage

APPENDIX B—EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND QUESTIONS

Methodology

Various methods of collecting qualitative and quantitative data were used in conducting this evaluation. Performance measurement indicators and potential data sources are presented below. An evaluation matrix was prepared to guide the evaluation process.

Methodology	Description
Document review	Administrative and financial documents of the Published Heritage Branch were reviewed. Performance statistics and other internal documents were also consulted.
Interviews	Between December 2019 and February 2020, 15 interviews were conducted with managers and employees of the Published Heritage Description Division. Interview guides were also developed to support information requirements.
Internal survey	In January and February 2020, an internal survey of managers and employees of the Published Heritage Description Division was conducted. The response rate was 57.6%. The information collected was used to answer the evaluation questions.
Performance data	Performance data from the Performance Information Profile was collected, analyzed and used in the evaluation report, to the extent possible.

The use of multiple data collection methods and data triangulation helped to corroborate the findings. This methodology is consistent with the Treasury Board Policy on Results (2016).

Evaluation matrix

The following table shows the various data sources used by the evaluation team to answer the evaluation questions.

Evaluation question	Data sources			
	Literature and internal document review	Employee interviews	Employee survey	Performance data
To what extent are description processes in place to address changes affecting LAC's digital environment ?	x	x	x	x
To what extent have the description priorities and expected results been achieved?	x	x	x	x
To what extent have resources allocated to the description activity been used in the best way possible?	x	x	x	x

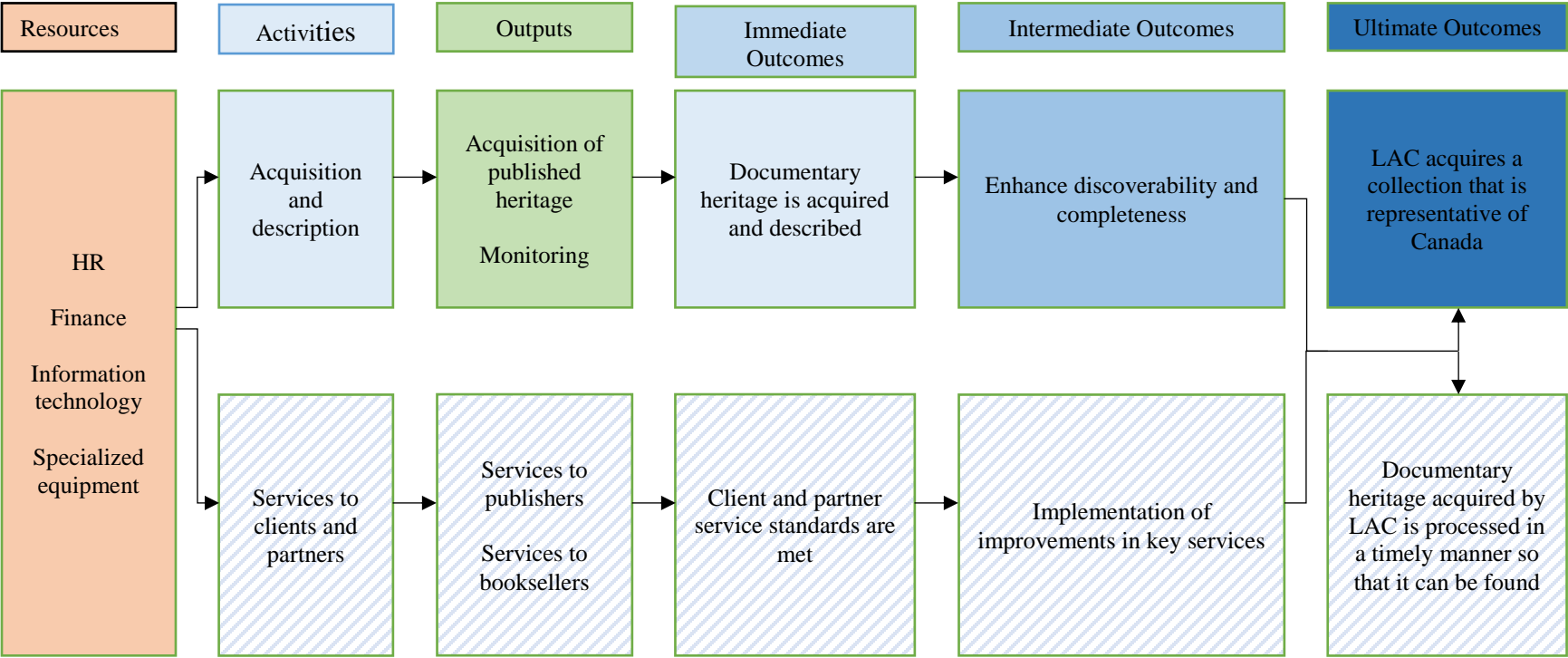
Appendix C—Performance Measurement Strategy

The evaluation used data collected during the period covered for targeted Performance Information Profile (PIP) indicators and for the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) indicators. The data were reviewed when they were available.

Key activity	Logic Model Item	Indicator	Definition	Data Collection Source and Frequency	Data Collection Lead
OUTPUTS					
Acquisition and description	Acquisition of published heritage	Number of new published titles acquired (PIP)—analog and digital	Calculation of the total number of new published titles acquired through legal deposit during the fiscal year	Integrated Library Management System Collection: Monthly Report: Quarterly	Manager, Canadiana Publications / Manager, Special Collection and Program Support
		Number of new published titles acquired (PIP)—analog and digital	Calculation of the total number of new published titles acquired through legal deposit during the fiscal year	Integrated Library Management System Collection: Monthly Report: Quarterly	Manager, Canadiana Publications / Manager, Special Collection and Program Support
Evaluation of documentary heritage	Evaluation and acquisition reports	Number of evaluation and acquisition reports	The indicator measures the volume of reports produced	AMICUS Quarterly	Project Manager, Project Office
	Acquisition decisions	Number of acquisition decisions	The indicator measures the acquisition decisions made	AMICUS Quarterly	Project Manager, Project Office
Acquisition and processing of documentary heritage	Acquisition agreements	Number of acquisition agreements signed	The indicator measures the number of acquisitions based on contractual obligations	AMICUS Monthly	Manager, Program Support
	Documentary heritage is acquired and processed	Volume of acquisitions: Number of titles published	The indicator measures the volume of documentary heritage acquired and processed	AMICUS Monthly	Acquisitions Team
	Documentary heritage is acquired and processed	Processing volume: Number of published documents processed	The indicator measures the volume of documentary heritage acquired and processed	AMICUS Monthly	Acquisitions Team
IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES					
	Documentary heritage is acquired and described	Number of titles described (PIP)	Calculation of the number of descriptions (new and modified) of published titles produced by LAC during the fiscal year	Integrated Library Management System Collection: Annual Report: Quarterly	Manager, Bibliographic Descriptions
	LAC acquires documentary heritage effectively	Average time to complete the evaluation of an information resource	The indicator measures the compliance of the evaluation and processing activities	Comparison against targets and benchmarks (once or twice a year)	Manager, Project Management
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES					
	Enhance the discoverability and completeness of documentary heritage	Percentage of cataloguing backlog eliminated (PIP)	Calculation of the ratio: Number of titles in the backlog catalogued (X) over the total number of items in the backlog (Y)	Integrated Library Management System Annual	Director, Description Division
	LAC's collection is relevant to and representative of Canadian society	Compliance with evaluation and acquisition policies and strategies	The indicator measures the extent to which acquisition decisions are consistent with the Evaluation and Acquisition Policy Framework	Annual	Manager, Project Management

Appendix D—Logic Model

Published Heritage Logic Model,¹⁶ 2015–16 to 2019–20
(Hashed elements are not reviewed in this evaluation.)



¹⁶ The evaluation team used the Published Heritage Acquisition and Processing Program logic model developed for the Performance Information Profile (PIP). However, it also used key activities, outputs and indicators found in the Program Alignment Architecture, under “Documentation of Canadian society” (2.1), that were in place in the period prior to April 2018. Indicator detail is provided in Appendix C.

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