Evaluation Report on the Prime Minister Papers Project 2017–2022
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The Evaluation Function

Accountability, Governance and Corporate Affairs Division


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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the Prime Minister Papers (PMP) Project (2017–2022). The purpose of the project was to acquire, process, preserve and make accessible the private records of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, and is directly linked to Library and Archives Canada's (LAC) mandate. It constitutes the latest addition to LAC's Private Archives collection of former prime ministers' fonds (PM fonds), which is one of LAC's oldest collections, dating back to the 1950s. It complements the official record of Government of Canada institutions, which is managed by LAC's Government Records Program.

The private documents of former prime ministers created during their years in office are of great significance as they provide a context for understanding the decision making in the highest political office in the country. They are essential to the preservation of Canada's history and allow users and researchers to study the decisions that have shaped the socio-political landscape of the country and its evolution as a nation.

The Stephen J. Harper fonds[1] is the largest digital collection received by LAC to date. It is 50 times larger than any previous transfer of digital records handled by LAC, and it is 330 times larger than any preceding PMP projects. The processing of the digital portion of the records required the application of 14 new specialized software tools. In addition, project staff developed and updated 21 operational policies, procedures and tools covering digital processing and description, monetary appraisal, secure asset management, and audiovisual workflows.

## Evaluation scope

The focus of the evaluation was threefold: lessons learned, best practices, and areas for improvement. The evaluation covered the project's five-year period, 2017-2018 to 2021-2022, and addressed the following questions:

- What were the major issues that LAC staff and management encountered in acquiring, processing, preserving, and providing access to former Prime Minister Harper's fonds?
- What were the best practices identified by the Project Team that would be useful for future fonds of a similar nature?
- What practices could be improved further?
- What practices proved inefficient and were abolished by the Project Team?
- To what extent is the project funding mechanism (Treasury Board submission) still relevant and efficient with respect to the needs of this type of project?

## Methodology

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[1] *Fonds* is an archival science term defined as "the entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator" (https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/fonds.html)

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the 2016 Treasury Board Policy on Results and Directive on Results. The evaluation followed a qualitative approach, which involved a document review, key informant interviews, and analysis of financial and project data.

## Main findings

Despite encountering complex challenges, the project was able to adapt and achieved its deliverables without significant delay. It became an innovation lab and generated a number of best practices that could be extrapolated to regular LAC operations and inform similar future projects. Furthermore, it was the diligence, passion and dedication of the project's staff, management and internal partners that ensured its successful delivery. Project management and staff fostered a collaborative environment, which allowed them to experiment with new ways of doing things, troubleshoot, and resolve inefficiencies accordingly.

LAC has a mandate and longstanding practice to acquire, process, preserve and make accessible the private papers of Canada's prime ministers through a special project funded via a Treasury Board submission (TB submission). The rationale for this approach was that these types of records have complex requirements that are difficult to predict and that exceed the normal operational capacity of LAC's Private Archives Division. However, LAC's experience with the most recent PMP project revealed that this approach is not as useful for donations that contain predominantly digital material. The obsolescence of digital material requires different processing practices and procedures which were not as established at LAC as those for analog material. As well, processing digital material requires a faster turnaround time and more agility.

Furthermore, the traditional approach does not effectively address the cyclical nature of PMP projects and disregards the continuous tasks that take place beyond the timeframe of the TB submission. Also, it does not take into account the fact that LAC has to absorb the long-term costs for the housing, care, preservation, maintenance of IT infrastructure and software, and the costs for ensuring the long-term accessibility of the fonds. This has implications for LAC's base budget.

The evaluation concluded that, while the 2017–2022 PMP project laid the foundation for future digital PM fonds by improving LAC's digital processing procedures and infrastructure, it is not clear whether those improvements would be sufficient in the long run. As project staff and management anticipate that future PM fonds will be increasingly digital, LAC needs to revise its approach to the acquisition and processing of PM fonds and explore more sustainable financing and resourcing options.

## Considerations for improvement

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the Director General, Private Archives and Published Heritage, should consider the following:

- enhance project planning capacity, particularly to ensure that the annual budget estimation realistically reflects the level of effort required for each project stage while taking into account the financial management rules of the Government of Canada;
- to the extent possible, explore anticipatory staffing options ahead of funding approvals to ensure availability of resources in a timely manner;

- revisit the overall PMP approach and explore all available options (starting with seeking internal efficiency) while taking into account the cyclical nature of the PM fonds, the long-term sustainability of the PM fonds post project, as well as the need for flexibility, agility and horizontality;
- explore options for combining mechanisms to ensure there is operational stability in PMP off-cycles and to increase resources during peak times;
- ensure that innovations and lessons learned from the project are shared with the relevant LAC operational areas.

# 1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the Project to Acquire, Process, Preserve and Make Accessible the Private Papers of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada.[2] The evaluation was a requirement under the terms set out in the Treasury Board submission for the funding of the project and was scheduled in Library and Archives Canada's (LAC) 2022–2027 Departmental Program Evaluation Plan (DPEP).

# 2. Evaluation Scope and Methodology

## 2.1 Evaluation scope

The purpose of the evaluation was to uncover the lessons learned from the Prime Minister Papers (PMP) project and to identify the project's successes, areas for improvement and best practices. The evaluation covered the five-year period of the project, from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022, and examined the following questions:

- What were the major issues that LAC staff and management encountered in acquiring, processing, preserving, and providing access to former Prime Minister Harper's fonds?
- What were the best practices identified by the Project Team that would be useful for future fonds of a similar nature?
- What practices could be improved further?
- What practices proved inefficient and were abolished by the Project Team?
- To what extent are the project funding mechanisms (Treasury Board submission) still relevant and efficient with respect to the needs of this type of project?

## 2.2 Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the 2016 Treasury Board Policy on Results and Directive on Results. The evaluation followed a qualitative approach, which involved a document review, key informant interviews, and analysis of financial and project data.

# 3. Project Description

## 3.1 Background

The Prime Minister Papers is one of LAC's oldest collections, containing documents dating back to the 1950s. It complements the official record of the Government of Canada's institutions managed by LAC's Government Records Program. The private documents of former prime ministers created during their years in office are of great significance as they provide a context for understanding the decision making in the highest political office in the country. They are essential to chronicling of the country's history and allow Canadians to study the decisions that have shaped the socio-political landscape of Canada and its evolution as a nation. It is a longstanding practice to acquire, process, preserve and make accessible the private papers of Canada's prime ministers through a one-time, standalone project funded through a TB

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[2] Hereinafter referred to as the "Prime Minister Papers (PMP) project"

submission. Additional and dedicated resources for this project were required because these type of records have complex requirements that are difficult to predict and that exceed LAC's normal operational capacity and budget.[3]

The Stephen J. Harper fonds is unique in its content and size. It is the first collection of prime minister papers containing a considerable portion of electronic and digital material. It contains 741 audiovisual carriers (670 gigabytes) and 113 terabytes of digital records, in addition to 620 boxes of textual material, 170 boxes of personal objects, and 48 hours of oral history interviews with the Right Honourable Stephen Harper (including a one-hour summary video and bilingual transcription). Included in that are over 1.2 million photographs (digital and analog), over 400,000 digital textual records, 123.4 metres of textual records, and over 1,300 hours of audiovisual material.

The project required the adoption of 14 new specialized software tools for the processing of digital archival records, such as Forensic Tool Kit (FTK), which allows for multiple visualisations of digital objects and metadata, and which has labeling, bookmarking and other functionality; Bad Peggy, which validates graphic digital objects (JPEG, PNG, BMP, GIF) and ensures conformity with format standards; and XnView, which allows viewing of graphic, video and sound recordings without modifying their metadata. Project staff developed and updated 21 operational policies, procedures and tools covering digital processing and description, monetary appraisal, secure asset management and audiovisual workflows.

## 3.2 Governance

The project used the following governance structure:

- LAC's Management Team provided strategic direction and set the priorities for the project.
- The Project Steering Committee provided project oversight, progress monitoring, strategic and budgetary oversight, issue management, direction and guidance.
- The Director General, Archives Branch, was accountable for the project and was responsible for regular reporting to LAC's Management Team in consultation with LAC's Operations Committee and Resources Committee.
- The Director, Science, Governance and Private Archives Division, was responsible for the outcomes, deliverables and results of the project.
- The manager of the Governance, Military and Political section provided advice and supported the coordination of project activities.
- The project manager provided project oversight, led the project team, and coordinated all the funding, implementation, reporting and deliverables of the project. The project manager reported to the Director, Science, Governance and Private Archives Division.
- The senior project archivist managed the archival project, led the required research and analysis, acted as the subject matter expert, and oversaw the appraisal and certification processes as well as the oral history project.

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[3] Projects involving the archives of prime ministers typically fall within the activities of the existing political archives portfolio in the Private Archives program at LAC; however, LAC does not have continuous funding for these types of projects.

## 3.3 Expected results

The expected outcomes of the project were the following:

Short-term results / deliverables:

- Supporting the former prime minister in preparing the records for donation.
- Ensuring safe storage of the records while they are in preparation.

Medium-term results / deliverables:

- Signing donor agreements for the official transfer of ownership from the former prime minister to LAC.
- Processing the records—selection, organization and description—according to LAC's policies and practices.
- Conducting a monetary evaluation of the records to certify them as cultural property—at the discretion of the former prime minister.

Long-term results / deliverables:

- Conducting an oral history project to collect memories of aspects of the former prime minister's personal and professional life through a recorded interview to explain and contextualize the records.

## 3.4 Resources

Tables 1 and 2 present the resources allocated to the project. The estimated project cost and funding requirements took into account the costs provided by Shared Services Canada (SSC) for information technology requirements as well as the size, complexity and security classification of the records, experience with previous PMP projects, and experience with other large archival projects.

Human resources were estimated on the basis of the volume and complexity of the records, the type of media present, the processing time, LAC's experience with past PMP projects, and a detailed analysis of the required needs and expertise. The full-time equivalents (FTEs) included a liaison team providing liaison between LAC and the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. This team consisted of an archival liaison officer as well as analog and digital strategic research analysts. The LAC archival operations team consisted of a mix of indeterminate and temporary staff, including a senior project archivist, archivists, archival assistants, a digital project officer, an imaging technician, an audiovisual conservator, records control clerks, and data control clerks. According to the project documentation, a 10% contingency fund for operations and maintenance was set aside to cover any unanticipated costs.

It can be observed that the project was not able to spend all resources as anticipated during the first two years of the period examined by the evaluation (tables 1 and 2). The project's additional resource needs for subsequent years were funded through LAC's Operating Budget carryforward. As a result of a combination of internal delays and external circumstances beyond LAC's control, the project had to be extended into the 2022-2023 fiscal year and internal funds were used to finance it.

Table 1 Project planned funding and actual spending for the period 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

| Project funding[4] | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022 | 2022-2023 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planned | 1,579,884 | 1,065,874 | 1,648,743 | 1,302,978 | 1,080,907 | 0 | 6,678,386 |
| Actual | 481,521 | 856,059 | 1,968,277 | 1,913,570 | 1,207,002 | 317,229 | 6,743,658 |
| Variance | 1,098,363 | 209,815 | (319,534) | (610,592) | (126,095) | (317,229) | (65,272) |

Table 2 Project planned and actual Full Time Equivalent (FTE) resources for the period 2017-2018 to 2022-2023

| Human Resources[5] | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020 | 2020-2021 | 2021-2022 | 2022-2023 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planned | 5.1 | 14.5 | 18.5 | 16.15 | 4.11 | 0 | 58.36 |
| Actual | 2.73 | 8.2 | 20.4 | 20.3 | 11.6 | 2.6 | 65.83 |
| Variance | 2.37 | 6.3 | (1.9) | (4.15) | (7.49) | (2.6) | (7.47) |

## 3.5 Project schedule

A large portion of the project was carried out under unprecedented working conditions that required the project team to pivot certain activities while work was already under way. In the project documentation, it is estimated that 40% of the project's five-year mandate took place under provincial health restrictions imposed by the Ontario and Quebec governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These restrictions significantly reduced the ability of the project's employees to report to the worksite. Despite that, the project was completed with a variance of four months from the initial completion date set out in the TB submission. The schedule variance and detailed mapping of project milestones are illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 3.

*Figure 1*



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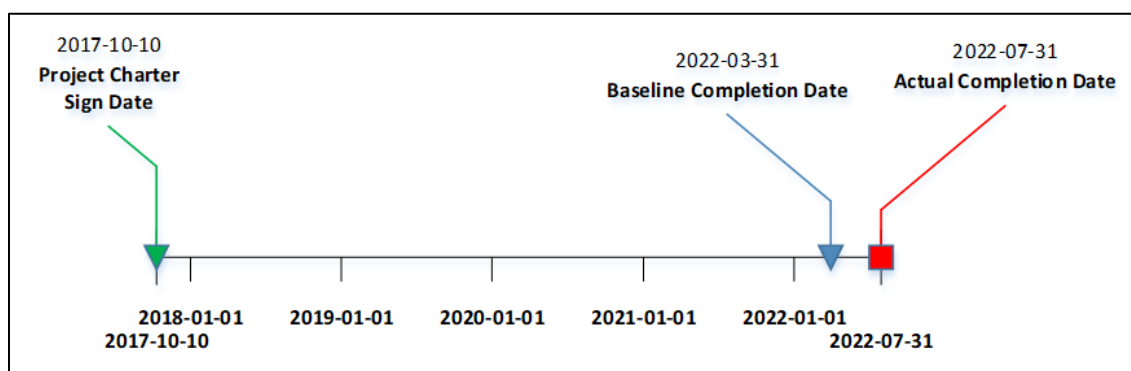
[4] As of November 2022, excluding the employee benefits plan, the PWGSC accommodation premium, SSC core information technology services, and HST, in Canadian dollars
[5] As of November 2022, in full-time equivalent

*Table 3*

| Original Approved Major Milestones | Original Planned Completion Date | Actual Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| TB approval – project approval and expenditure authority | April 2017 | April 2017 |
| Completion of infrastructure fit-up (office for former prime minister and secure storage space) | April 2017 | March 2018 |
| Sign all donor agreements | December 2018 | November 2019 |
| All records are processed | June 2021 | June 2022 |
| All records are appraised for monetary value and certified as cultural property (as needed) | December 2021 | April 2023 |
| Oral history project completed | March 2021 | January 2022 |
| Records are available to Canadians | March 2021 | July 2022 |
| Project closure | March 2021 | July 2022 |

## 4. Evaluation Findings

### 4.1 Learning and best practices generated by the project

#### 4.1.1 Major issues encountered by the project

Finding 1: The project team encountered complex challenges arising primarily from the digital portion of the records in the donation. However, the project adapted accordingly and was able to achieve all deliverables without significant delays. In addition, challenges encountered at the governance, resourcing, and project set-up levels, as well as external factors outside the control of the project team, affected the project operations and timeline.

**Challenges arising from the digital portion of the records**

Project documentation and interview data indicate that the Stephen J. Harper fonds is the largest digital donation LAC has received to date. The collection is 50 times larger than any transfer of digital records handled by LAC to date, and it is 330 times larger than any previous PMP project. Project staff and management stated that they did not have the same level of experience and technical skills for processing digital records as they did for analog records. They encountered file formats, quantity of digital records, and security issues they had not dealt with before. Senior project management acknowledged they realized very early into the project that their past experience dealing with Prime Minister Projects (PMP) was based on analog records and could not be applied to the digital material in the current donation. The Stephen J. Harper fonds was an eye-opening experience for them and laid the groundwork for approaching similar future projects.

Staff pointed out that their involvement in the project made them aware that certain tools, such as the MIKAN[6] and MISACS[7] databases, were outdated and not adapted to the handling of digital records. Moreover, the tools were based on manual processes and did not allow for automation. This was problematic given that they had to deal with 60,000 audiovisual files, for example. In addition, they encountered conflicting or inconsistent practices and procedures related to the processing of digital files, disconnected workflows, and procedure gaps. Staff stated that, in some cases, existing digital procedures appeared to be designed for a different reality, one where LAC was getting occasional digital files on old carriers, and were not thought out for processing large volumes of records.

Some staff encountered technology infrastructure issues that were not anticipated and planned for. For example, they needed laptops with higher processing capabilities and higher bit version of certain software, such as Excel, as a result of the large volume of data they were processing. However, they stressed that these technological requirements emerged during the project and could not have been estimated in advance. Another issue for staff was the presence of digital records classified "secret" and above. Staff indicated that LAC did not have the infrastructure to process and preserve such records and that securing the necessary equipment was challenging. For example, not all staff had the expertise for configuring a "secret" digital environment and above. Furthermore, staff pointed out that, by the time the archival team was in place, the computer equipment that was procured initially had become outdated; it was adequate but not as advanced as staff needed it to be for their purposes.

**External factors outside the control of the project team**

According to project staff and management, external circumstances outside LAC's control, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, also contributed to the delays in the processing set-up phase. Work models had to be adjusted and required staff to work in a dispersed manner, and this posed challenges in terms of coordination and management. Staff could not be on location until it became critical to do so. However, they did extensive planning in the meantime so that work could proceed smoothly once they were back on the premises. Project staff were appreciative of the assistance they received from other LAC divisions whose operations had slowed down. Infrastructure procurement was also delayed as the providers were themselves impacted by the pandemic. For example, it was challenging to obtain installation support as certain systems had to operate offline and the updates to them had to be done manually.

**Challenges arising from governance, resourcing and project set-up levels**

Key informant interviews and project documentation revealed that there were hiring issues in the beginning of the project that impacted the planning of archival work, the transfer of the material and the start of processing. The project made use of two independent teams: a liaison team providing liaison between LAC and the Right Honourable Stephen Harper's office; and a LAC archival team.
- The liaison team consisted of individuals who had experience working in the Prime Minister's Office and who were familiar with the records it holds. The team provided support to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper in the selection of the records for donation and the preparation of the donation for transfer to LAC.
- The archival team at LAC consisted of a mix of LAC indeterminate staff assigned to the project on a temporary basis, and temporary staff hired for the duration of the project. The team was

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[6] MIKAN – application developed by LAC in 1997 to search, create and modify information about its archival holdings. The application name is based on the Algonquin word *mikan*, which means "road," "path" or "discovery."
[7] MISACS – Moving Image and Sound Archives Collection System. It is LAC's application containing "all of the intellectual, physical manifestation, donor and work order information about the institution's moving image and sound collection."

responsible for the processing, arrangement and description of the records in preparation for preservation.

According to the program documentation, the manager of the Governance, Military and Political Archives (GMPA) section in LAC's Private Archives Division served as project support and point of contact with the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, and was the functional manager of the liaison team. However, interviewees indicated that the Manager GMPA / Project Support had no oversight or control of the team's work. The liaison team in turn was dependent on the availability of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper and his staff. This had an impact on their work and their ability to meet the donation deadline—December 31, 2018—set out in the TB submission and the project charter. Consequently, the contract for the liaison team had to be extended, and this had implications for the financial resources of the project and for the start of archival processing work.

Interview data further revealed that there were hiring issues and delays in the archival team as well. For example, the archival lead was hired at the same time as the archival team, and this impacted the planning of the work and did not allow for sufficient preparation before the team's arrival. This resulted in an increased workload for the lead, who had to plan and execute at the same time while organizing the work and managing the team's operations. Furthermore, there were delays in getting the resources requested from Quality Assurance and Digital Integration. According to staff, not having these resources from the beginning of the project affected the work of the archival team and increased the workload of some staff as they had to take on additional tasks to compensate. Staff emphasized that the lack of Quality Assurance support to double-check people's work and to bring in procedural and standards knowledge during the project set-up stage caused certain inefficiencies, such as staff having to redo work and readjust at later stages of the project.

Project management indicated that the project governance did not play out as initially planned in the Treasury Board submission and that the roles and responsibilities at the project management level need to be defined better for future projects. Project management had intended for the archival lead to have the necessary delegation to approve leave and set performance objectives. However, the classification and level of the position did not allow for these delegations, and the functional managerial responsibilities for the team were given to the Manager GMPA / Project Support. This resulted in confusion among project staff as to the reporting structure and caused at times a duplication of effort for the archival lead and the Manager GMPA / Project Support. For example, project staff would bring issues to the archival lead that were not in the lead's sphere of responsibility and which had to then be referred to the Manager GMPA / Project Support. As well, according to project management, this increased the workload of the Manager GMPA / Project Support, who had to manage both the PMP project team and the GMPA section. Project management also realized that the scope of the work was too wide and the archival team was too big to be managed by a single archival lead. However, at that point, the project management team was much too advanced in the execution of the project to make changes, but indicated it would take that into account in the planning of the next PMP project.

Another major issue for project management and staff related to the resources for the project. Both groups pointed out that due to the budgetary pressures experienced by LAC in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, the project lost a substantial portion of its term human resources, and that financial resources were reassigned to other institutional priorities. This had a negative impact on project timelines, deliverables and efficiency, as well as on the workload and morale of remaining personnel. The project team had to restrict its efforts to the deliverables outlined in the TB submission and had to scope out extra tasks that could have been beneficial to the processing of the material. In addition, there was an important loss of expertise as some of the temporary staff had specific skills and specialized knowledge.

Staff reported feeling overwhelmed and overworked as they had to absorb the tasks that the individuals who were laid off previously carried out and, in some cases, had to make corrections to the work that had been done. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the support they received from project management and other LAC archival sections during that time.

However, this perception of project management and staff that resources were reassigned was not substantiated by the project's financial data. In fact, while the project lost a considerable portion of its determinate human resources, its overall budget was not affected, since the project's actual spending exceeded the project funding by $65,272 (see Table 1 in section 3.4).

Staff and management also acknowledged that the use of temporary staff is not an efficient resourcing solution. They came to the realization that there is certain loss of expertise and knowledge as temporary staff is not retained after the project ends. Both staff and management stressed the importance of keeping institutional memory related to PMP projects in LAC instead of restarting the hiring process every time there is a new project. According to staff, having a larger permanent employee base dedicated to the PMP projects would provide stability and continuity because that base would serve as a bridge between the projects and would ensure consistent knowledge build-up.

Another challenging aspect, according to project management, was the fact that LAC is too process-oriented and lacks the agility, flexibility and horizontality that PMP projects require. They also pointed out that LAC lacks resources who are properly trained in project management. Furthermore, that process mentality across the institution does not take into account the specificity and time sensitivity of PMP projects. Project management expressed frustration with having to change the classification of positions specified in the TB submission after project approval was granted, and stated that this contributed to the hiring delays. In addition, LAC's financial management processes (i.e., managing all LAC financial resources in one envelope) introduced a sense of uncertainty for project management and made them feel that they were not in control of their financial resources. All of these factors made the PMP project very difficult to plan and manage.

Staff and management noted that, although overall collaboration with internal partners across LAC was good, there were challenges, which they attribute to resource restrictions and conflicting internal priorities within other LAC divisions. As a result PMP staff were not able to always get the support they needed in a timely manner. For example, the project team had to do their own research for infrastructure and software and at times had to take the initiative in finding solutions. Also, certain tools were not in place at the time when the team needed them, and this prevented staff from using the full capacity of those tools and resulted in some efficiency loss.

### 4.1.2 Best practices identified by the project team

Finding 2: The project benefitted most from the investment, diligence and dedication of the staff, internal partners and management (both middle and senior levels). The project became an innovation lab, and the learning and experience it generated could be potentially integrated into LAC's regular operations and inform future similar projects.

The biggest takeaway for project staff was the experience working with digital records. They now consider themselves one of the few teams at LAC with the most experience in that field. Given the large volume of digital records involved, the project allowed them to test the procedures for acquiring and processing digital material at scale. Staff were also able to make improvements to existing LAC procedures by building up or adding new steps to address gaps in the overall process. In addition, they

developed a tracking tool and checklists to ensure all project staff were following the same process, and project workflows specific to their practical operational needs.

Staff stated that what enabled them to work well together was the composition of the team itself. They praised the selection of team members, which brought together different and complementary specialities and expertise. Staff stated that, whenever they were faced with an issue, there was someone on the team who knew how to go about it and that, if there was not, they were able to work together to find a solution. In addition, staff found that, because their project roles differed from their regular operational roles, they were able to be agile, explore more and be more innovative.

Project staff defined themselves as solutions seekers and innovators who had high analytical and problem solving skills. For example, they found an innovative way of working with Quality Assurance in order to automate certain tasks in the MIKAN system by circumventing some of the system's design flaws. In another example, staff pointed out that a team member created a tool in Excel that allows for the automation and faster assessment of access conditions for records. Another colleague devised an automated way for creating a folder structure for fonds.

After analyzing LAC's existing workflows and procedures, staff realized that those were not feasible given the size and composition of the collection they were dealing with. This is the first PMP collection that contains digital records classified as "secret." This necessitated that staff create workflows for processing records in Tempest[8] and for moving records between locations. Staff also noted that the capacity of certain software was not sufficiently documented in existing procedures. They developed user guides to address these deficiencies. Furthermore, staff created a digital records processing work planning tool, which they intend to share not only internally at LAC but also with the wider archival community to facilitate further learning and innovation.

Towards the end of the project, staff had to make modifications to certain workflows and procedures in order to make it easier for external records appraisers to work with the current PMP collection. Staff stated that there were high data volumes and varying approaches to staging data stores for processing. The presence of related data across multiples machines and servers made it difficult for the appraisers to navigate and understand, therefore they decided to consolidate that data on a Tempest machine. This had not been done before, but staff see it as becoming a common practice in the future.

Staff identified a number of innovations developed during the course of the project they believe could become common practice:

- using the Forensic Tool Kit (FTK) software to scan records for personal identifying information
- using the script developed by Information Technology staff, which helped archivists to sort and arrange large quantities of data during record processing
- applying a procedure enabling staff to check for the presence of macros flagged as a security concern by the Digital Preservation team, an issue that needed to be addressed
- splitting the Quality Assurance process into two parts in order to accommodate the timelines for archival processing and data preservation

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[8] Tempest is a specialized technology for the protection of secret records.

- reviewing the SIP (System Information Package)[9] workflow in order to accommodate the storage capacity limits of LTO[10] tapes, and
- creating a new workflow for writing SIPs containing secret data to LTO tapes.

Project management stated that they needed the additional resources provided through the TB submission mechanism; however, they also recognized that they need sustained resources throughout the project, not only during peak times. According to project management, what worked well for the project was the willingness of internal partners to go the extra mile in order to understand how the project team worked and what it needed. Furthermore, it was crucial for project management that their internal partners across LAC put the project first rather than expect the project to adapt to the way LAC worked. However, according to project management, the frame of thinking depended on the individual.

Another practice beneficial to the project was having a common planning tool with IT that helped the project team avoid having to place individual requests for support and enabled IT to proactively plan the availability of its resources.

Project management also stated that having a director-level Project Steering Committee had worked out very well as this had allowed having all stakeholders around the table and was helpful in finding solutions to issues that emerged throughout the project. Other things that worked well, according to project management, were the monitoring, reporting and documentation practices they developed, as well as allowing space for testing new ways of doing things and not being afraid to fail. According to project management, innovation was based not only on what worked but also on what did not work.

### 4.1.3 Practices in need of further improvement

Finding 3: The project revealed that further improvements need to be made to the procedures, workflows and roles and responsibilities for digital records, as well as to project hiring and recordkeeping practices, the competencies of the project manager, and the funding mechanism itself.

Staff stated that the procedures, workflows, and roles and responsibilities for digital records need to be improved further, in order to ensure efficient collaboration among internal partners. Because the latest PMP project was the first to contain secret digital records, staff had to work with internal partners in Circulation and Physical Control, Digital Integration, Digital Preservation, and Physical Security to ensure the proper barcoding, storage and protection of the LTO tapes containing secret digital material. Staff became aware during the course of the project that there was a lack of procedures and practices in that regard. Furthermore, it was not well defined who was to assume responsibility for maintaining the systems and software acquired during the course of the project in the long term.

Other improvements suggested by staff include the following:

- review practices for providing access to digital records as there are various responsibility centres involved;
- enhance resourcing of the IT division in order to enable it to provide better support to future PMP projects;
- enhance guidance on the use of software;
- enhance guidance for donors about the preparation of electronic records for donation; and

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[9] SIP – Submission Information Package. SIPs are used for the purpose of digital preservation. The term originated with the Open Archival Information System Reference Model, an ISO standard for digital repositories.
[10] LTO – Linear Tape Open (LTO), also known as the LTO Ultrium format, is a powerful, scalable and adaptable open-tape format optimized for high capacity, maximum storage density, and performance. https://www.lto.org/what-is-lto/

- create detailed timelines with clear associated roles and responsibilities for the various internal partners.

Project staff also pointed out that having a more direct collaboration between archival staff and IT staff could be beneficial to future PMP projects, since the two groups have complementary skills.

According to project management, improvements are needed in terms of hiring practices, the funding mechanism itself, the competencies of the project manager, and recordkeeping practices. Project management noted that having the lead archivist in place at the start of the project is important as this person brings extensive expertise that can be helpful for the project manager in planning and rolling out the project, since the latter may not understand how long some archival activities can take. Furthermore, management pointed out that the TB submission as a funding mechanism is restrictive because the hiring cannot go ahead prior to its approval and the actual funds being in place. Some members of the project management team pointed out that future projects need to have a properly trained and certified project manager as that would improve the overall management of the project, including its financial aspect. It would also decrease the project director's workload. Management also suggested that recordkeeping for the purposes of the project has to be built into project management or automated in order to lessen organizing efforts.

### 4.1.4 Inefficient practices

Finding 4: Project management and staff were able to troubleshoot and find solutions to the issues they encountered throughout the project. Inefficiencies were resolved, and the experience gained would be used to inform future PMP projects involving digital records.

Staff could not speak to the inefficient practices that were abandoned altogether because, in their opinion, the nature of the project required innovation and experimentation. They were able to find solutions to the issues they encountered or workarounds. It was part of the learning experience afforded by the project. For example, staff changed the sequence of steps in a procedure with respect to the ingest and processing of digital records in order to be more efficient. The records contained a large portion of digital objects that were not actual records, and some of the objects were in unknown formats. Instead of following the standard procedure, which would have involved bit-level preservation where the archivists would do light processing and send the records for preservation, project staff decided to take another approach. They processed and cleaned the records first and then sent them for ingest and preservation. By doing so, they ensured the records were in good condition and did not contain non-archival content. This helped avoid possible corruption and accessibility issues later on. Staff wanted to avoid wasting preservation efforts and space.

Staff also pointed out that it was not possible to anticipate and plan for everything ahead of time. For example, they could not anticipate what the fonds structure would be like prior to getting the records and starting to analyze them. They also could not anticipate how the physical and intellectual processing of the records would line up; it took them about a year to figure that out. In another example, staff realized that a software that had been procured was not actually needed because they had anticipated and planned for email records, but instead got an email database, which is completely different.

According to staff, LAC's digital processing procedures did not take into account that automated tools could be used for some of the tasks required of archivists. For example, staff ran into a problem where they had to use the MIKAN system to assign identification numbers to the digital records. This was problematic because the system design is such that the system assigns identification numbers at the end of an archival project once the records have been processed and described. However, digital records require that such numbers be assigned at the beginning of the process. This resulted in a chicken-and-

egg situation. The team was able to find a workaround solution, but they emphasized that such a situation could have been avoided had LAC had a functional Digital Asset Management System (DAMS), which would automatically assign the identification numbers.

Another inefficiency identified by staff was the absence of a dedicated Quality Assurance resource, which had been requested and planned for as part of the project team. It became clear after the start of the project that this option was not feasible given the small size and high workload of the Quality Assurance team, who could not provide a full-time resource. Fortunately, one of the project team members had the necessary competencies, system knowledge, and permissions to take on that role. However, had the Quality Assurance resource been in place as planned, that team member could have been used in another capacity.

Project staff and management agreed that treating the PMP as a special project is not sustainable and that a more permanent solution is needed, primarily because ongoing activities associated with the PMP that are on-going and continue outside the timeframe specified in the TB submission. The PMP is part of LAC's acquisitions and cannot be done in isolation. LAC continues to receive additional donations associated with various PM fonds, which require continued collaboration with other LAC areas. Both groups pointed out that the PMP is cyclical and that the change of government and frequency of that change determine the planning for a new PM fonds.

Project management acknowledged that it was LAC's indeterminate employees who completed the project and that 40% of the work was carried out under very challenging conditions. They also stated that one practice they would abolish is having a large number of new employees involved in future PMP projects. In their view, LAC needs to put in place a permanently funded program mechanism that would cover all political archives, including the PMP. Project management also pointed out the need to have a credentialed project manager, a dedicated resource from Finance Branch, and a more stable processing space. The latter is of pressing importance as LAC is about to lose the space used by the project at 395 Wellington, and no other processing space for the purposes of PMP is being planned for.

Project management stressed that what is crucial for the success of a project like the PMP is having agile leadership, as well as having competent and expert individuals heading the design and delivery project stages. They stated that it was important to allow space for staff to think, reflect and find solutions, given the predominantly digital nature of the records. Another important factor, according to management, is having appropriate infrastructure in place as the team's innovation capacity is limited only by the availability of the infrastructure. In that respect, there is need for more administrative flexibility as PMP projects require a faster turnaround time and not having to go through burdensome justification procedures (e.g., when purchasing software). They also acknowledged that, without the dedication of the team as a whole (i.e., both staff and management), the project results would not have been the same.

## 4.2 Relevance and efficiency of the funding mechanism for Prime Minister Papers projects

Finding 5: The experience of LAC with the most recent PMP project calls into question the relevance of the funding model altogether. While the TB submission and the special- project approach followed for Prime Minister Papers projects are useful in providing additional resources, they present operational challenges in terms of long-term sustainability.

According to project staff and management, the special-project approach and the funding mechanism appear to have outlived their usefulness and relevance. They pointed out that there is a need for a different funding mechanism, one that allows for more stable, permanent funding. Staff also pointed out that the TB submission process is very heavy, demanding and time consuming, and that it takes extensive internal resources to prepare. Also, because the process is subject to external approval, it impacts the work related to the PM fonds. Furthermore, it lacks flexibility. This is detrimental because certain aspects of the project cannot be anticipated in advance. For example, the pace of technological development is so fast that project staff cannot rely on past PMP experience as was the practice up until now.

At the same time, both project staff and management acknowledged that LAC needs the additional resources obtained via the TB submission.[11] Project management stated that, without these resources, they would be forced to stop regular operations and focus on the PMP project alone, as they would not be able to do both. Staff pointed out that the project was successful largely because they were in roles different from their substantive positions and therefore were able to concentrate entirely on the project.

Project Management stated that using a TB Submission as a supplementary funding mechanism has been the go-to practice for PM Fonds. However, they were not aware of, and have not explored, other funding options. On the basis of their experience with the recent PMP project, they acknowledged that the model needs to change, primarily because there are continuous tasks associated with PMP projects that are absorbed by the regular operations of the Private Archives division. They maintain that the PMP project addresses only a small and very specific portion of the overall activities related to the continued management of the PMP collection. For example, former prime ministers regularly contact LAC with requests for access to their records, which can take up to 250 hours of regular staff's time.

Project management envision the creation of a program or a permanent team dedicated to Political Archives, which can be bolstered at times when a new PM fonds comes in, but whose primary task will be to deal with the activities related to political archives in the time between new PMP projects. In project management's view, having a program would allow for a more flexible, versatile, and modular team in keeping with the needs of new, incoming PM fonds. Such a program  team would also make it possible to keep expertise within LAC and would stop the wasteful practice of hiring temporary staff.

Project management are considering using LAC permanent staff for future PMP projects and temporary staff to supplement regular operations. Ideally, project management would like to have a simpler and more flexible financing mechanism that can be put on hold between PMP projects and does not require resubmitting funding requests, providing justification or awaiting approval from Treasury Board. In their view, the five-year formula used by TB submissions does not allow for that. Project management acknowledged that they cannot start some of the PMP project activities (for example, hiring and procurement) until they obtain the approval of the TB submission and that the spending of allocated funds is limited by a fixed timeframe.

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[11] According to the LAC Project Management Framework, a Treasury Board submission is required for projects exceeding $2.5 million.

## 5. Conclusion

The acquisition of the private papers of Canada's former prime ministers is an important way through which LAC fulfills its mandate of acquiring, preserving and making accessible Canada's documentary heritage. Thanks to the Prime Minister Papers (PMP) projects, LAC has built a rich collection that complements the Government Records Collection. However, the PMP projects have added complexity that sets them apart from LAC's regular Private Archives operations. They are cyclical in nature as they depend on the change of government, but also extend beyond the timeframe of a specific project. Consequently, there are several sets of tasks associated with them:

1. Generic tasks – related to planning each project (including estimating the extent of the archival material and its processing and preservation requirements, as well as estimating the required human and financial resources, infrastructure and processing amenities for the project), preparing the TB submission to secure funding, negotiating with donors, and providing support to a prime minister's staff for the purpose of preparing the records for donation;
2. Project-specific tasks – associated with the management and execution of project deliverables;
3. Continuous tasks – related to the management of the PM fonds post project, such as organizing and processing additional donations associated with existing PM fonds, reviewing record access conditions, and responding to access requests.

In addition, several factors introduce considerable uncertainty and add to the intricacy of a PMP project:

- Outgoing prime ministers are not obligated to donate their private records to LAC and can choose a different institution;
- The frequency of government change (especially in the case of minority governments) can create situations where a PMP project may be in progress and a new one has to be started;
- LAC has a limited time in which to obtain the records of outgoing prime ministers after they leave office;
- Technological requirements for the processing and preservation of digital records are constantly changing.

The special-project approach adopted for the PMP appears to blur the boundaries among the various project tasks. It concentrates primarily on the sets of tasks immediately associated with the planning and execution of a PMP project and does not take into account the continuous tasks involved. The assumption at the heart of the approach appears to be that PMP projects will be carried out by a mix of LAC permanent staff and temporary staff, the underlying premise being that LAC has solid expertise and established practices, which can be supplemented as needed for specific tasks and specialized knowledge. It presumes a somewhat fixed model, but fails to take into account external dynamic variables such as changes in the nature of archival material. While paper records are a stable format for which there are established practices and standards, digital records are more unpredictable as a result of the constant evolution of formats and technology and the fact that the practices and standards for handling them are still developing. The special-project approach is to try to accommodate the cyclical nature of PM fonds. However, the need to constantly secure funding, human resources, processing space, and IT software and infrastructure is straining Science, Governance and Political Private Archives operations.

LAC has come to rely on the TB submission funding mechanism to augment its resources as its regular Private Archives operations cannot handle the added intensity of effort required for the acquisition and processing of new PM fonds. However, experience with the recent PMP project revealed that this approach is not as useful for donations that contain predominantly digital material. The obsolescence of digital material requires different processing practices and procedures, which were not as established at LAC for digital material as they were for analog material. As well, processing digital material requires a faster turnaround time and more agility. Furthermore, digital material requires specialized knowledge, which some of the temporary staff hired for the recent project possessed, but which could not be retained. Adding to that is the fact that LAC would need to absorb the additional ongoing costs for the housing, care, preservation and maintenance of IT infrastructure and software acquired in the course of a PMP project, and to ensure the long-term accessibility of the fonds. This has implications for LAC's general budget.

The recent PMP project adopted a horizontal interdisciplinary approach and included members from key areas contributing to the project deliverables. This approach created a positive collaborative atmosphere, which was beneficial to the project overall. In addition, having a director-level Project Steering Committee provided a space for discussing and resolving issues that emerged throughout the project. The evaluation noted the extraordinary commitment, passion and dedication that staff and management had for the project. Staff worked tirelessly under unprecedented and challenging circumstances to ensure the project was delivered within the timelines set out in the TB submission. Despite all odds, they were able to deliver with a minimal delay of four months. Management also spared no effort to ensure that the project went smoothly and that staff had everything they needed in order to work efficiently.

While the 2017–2022 PMP project laid the foundation for future digital PM fonds by improving LAC's digital processing procedures and infrastructure, it is not clear whether those improvements will be sufficient in the long run. As project staff and management anticipate that future PM fonds will be increasingly digital, LAC needs to revise its approach to the acquisition and processing of PM fonds and explore more sustainable financing and resourcing options.

## 6. Considerations for improvement

In the spirit of continuous improvement the Director General, Private Archives and Published Heritage, should consider the following:

- enhance project planning capacity, particularly to ensure the annual budget estimation realistically reflects the level of effort required for each project stage while taking into account the financial management rules of the Government of Canada;
- to the extent possible, explore anticipatory staffing options ahead of funding approvals in order to ensure availability of resources in a timely manner;
- revisit the overall PMP approach and explore all available options (starting with seeking internal efficiency)  while taking into account the cyclical nature of the PM fonds, the long-term sustainability of the PM fonds post project, as well as the need for flexibility, agility and horizontality;
- explore options for combining mechanisms to ensure there is operational stability in PMP off-cycles and to increase resources during peak times;

- ensure innovations and lessons learned from the project are shared with the relevant LAC operational areas.