Summary of the Evaluation Report on the Processing of Private Archives (2015–2020)

Program Description

This summary presents the results of the evaluation of the processing component of the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) Acquisition and Processing of Private Archives Program (APPAP). Archival processing is the means by which an institution gains physical and intellectual control over documentary heritage material it has obtained through donation, purchase or transfer. Archival processing involves the arrangement and description of archival material to prepare it for access and long-term preservation.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation examined the following issues:

- To what extent are the internal policies, procedures and service standards adhered to during the processing of private archives?
- How efficient is the processing of private archives at LAC? and
- What progress has been made in attaining the short- and medium-term program results to which the component contributes?

Evaluation Scope and Methodology

The evaluation covered the period from April 2015 to March 2020, and used a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative lines of evidence, including a literature and internal document review, key informant interviews, an employee survey, and an analysis of financial and performance information.

Evaluation Findings

- Efforts are still required to complete the review and update the rest of the program's internal processing policy instruments; clarify roles and responsibilities; and better communicate changes made to staff.
- The processing workflow is not functioning in an optimal way.
- There is an imbalance in the amount of time and the level of effort that staff dedicate to processing tasks.
- Employees are not clear about which work activities are core and which are secondary.
- For the most part, the performance targets for processing private archival material are met.
- The amount of unprocessed material in proportion to total private archives holdings is low, and the program has taken measures to address the issue.

Conclusions

The evaluation concluded that, despite the above issues, the program component has made good progress in achieving its results. Nonetheless, the unprocessed material remains inaccessible to Canadians and its long-term preservation is at risk. Sustained effort is needed to ensure that the backlog is processed consistently and remains at a manageable level.

Recommendations

The Management of Private Archives processing should:

1. Ensure that policy instruments related to private archives processing are up to date, and implement measures for ongoing communication of any updates or changes to staff;

2. Ensure that the processing workflow is documented and communicated to staff;

3. Implement a mechanism whereby managers are consulted before archival staff are asked to participate in other institutional activities; and

4. Establish and communicate an operational plan to enable staff to better prioritize their work activities.

Management response: Program management accepted all the recommendations and put in place an action plan including targets and an implementation schedule. For details on the action plan, please refer to Appendix A of the evaluation report.