

ARCHIVING

Needs Analysis for Artist-Run Centres' Archives

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BACKGROUND

A 2011 report commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts found that many Artist-Run Centres (ARCs) lack the necessary resources to digitize and make their archives available online (Burgess and De Rosa, 2011). Lucky (2016) reasserts this problem and describes how ARCs have limited capacity for archiving or digitizing and are facing problems preserving and making their archives accessible. Currently, PAVED Arts in Saskatoon has a collection of documents and other physical materials in addition to the information stored digitally on their website, social media platforms, and office computers. They wish to preserve and make this information accessible to their community online.

METHODOLOGY

In collaboration with PAVED, we are working to develop the best digital archiving strategy to meet the needs of their community. To understand what ARC archives are being used for, and what they could be used for in the future, we disseminated an online survey to all ARCs in Canada. The survey asked about the respondents' use of archives for their work, their ideas about what ARC archives are for, what types of information should be kept, and what the focus of their archives should be. The results of this survey will inform the design of the PAVED archive and our recommendation for other ARCs.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this research is to create a digital toolkit that will be useful for ARCs who want to develop a digital archive. This toolkit will allow the artist-run community to organize, preserve, and use their archives to meet their organizational goals. This stage of the project explores why ARCs want to put resources into developing their archives and what people want to use these archives for.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Have you used other archives in your work, research, or art practice?

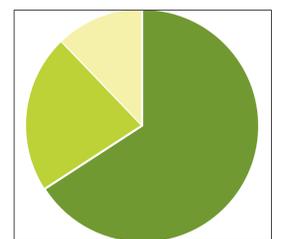


Figure 1. Respondents' archive usage

Which archive(s) have you used (online/in person)?

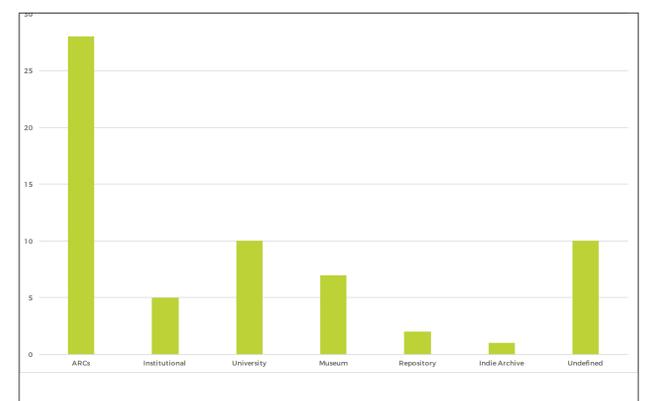


Figure 2. Number of respondents who have used different archives (online/in person)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are many benefits to digitizing and making ARCs archives available online:

- ▶ Benefits artists by preserving a record of their work exhibited at the gallery;
- ▶ Provides a research resource for students, artists, curators, and academics;
- ▶ Frees up limited physical space in buildings by making it possible to browse the collection online;
- ▶ Makes the archive accessible and sustainable for ARC employees, members, and the community.

This research is the first step in identifying what kind of digital platform will best meet the needs of the PAVED community and in defining a method that other ARCs can use to develop their own digital archives.

▶ 27 of 41 total respondents have used archives (of any kind) for their work (Figure 1). This indicates that archives are useful resources for members of this community.

▶ Respondents' who have used other archives have most commonly used archives from: (1) other ARCs, (2) Universities, and (3) Museums (Figure 2).

▶ The purpose of ARC archives fall under three major themes: organizational transparency, accessibility, and preserving historical records.

▶ Nine (9) out of 41 respondents who have not used archives also expressed ideas about what PAVED archive should be. This indicates a political interest in the function of archives, beyond their use as a research tool.

REFERENCES:

Burgess, M., & De Rosa, M. (2011). The Distinct Role of Artist-Run Centres in the Canadian Visual Arts Ecology. MDR Burgess Consultants. Retrieved from http://www.arccc-cctaa.org/en/files/resources/Study_The-Distinct-Role-of-Artist-Run-Centres-in-the-Visual-Arts-Ecology.pdf
Lucky, S. (2016). ARChives: Exploring the Community Archives of Canadian Artist-run Centres (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Alberta, Edmonton AB.