

# Northumberland County Archives & Museum

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## Strategic Plan 2020-2023

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## Executive Summary

Northumberland County recognizes that Archives and Museums are vital concentrators of knowledge that exist to make historical investigation possible and promote accountability, transparency, and diversity. The materials they hold are essential extensions of human memory that can be used to make connections between experiences and across generations.

Northumberland County Archives and Museum is a critical repository of information which engages the public through a variety of public programming initiatives to foster a deeper, nuanced understanding of culture and heritage in Northumberland County.

Northumberland County Archives and Museum recognizes the role colonial institutions have played in the cultural oppression, misrepresentation, and censure of cultures deemed the other, specifically First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities.

Northumberland County Archives and Museum will actively seek opportunities for learning and community engagement to build meaningful, diverse and authentic representation and continue collecting in a way that ensures the plurality of experiences in our communities today are available for investigation and interpretation in the future.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Review the current status of the Northumberland County Archives and Museum.
- Define a vision for the Northumberland County Archives and Museum which promotes and supports the County vision.
- Lay the groundwork for a significant transition to a new facility and enhanced services.

## Land and Treaty Acknowledgement

Northumberland County is situated on Mississauga Territory and is the traditional territory of the Mississauga. Northumberland County respectfully acknowledges that the Mississauga Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters in perpetuity, and they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come.

We have an individual and institutional responsibility to honour the treaties of Turtle Island.

## Section 1: Introduction

The Northumberland County Archives and Museum ensures the responsible management of archival materials and artefacts created or received through corporate duties and activities of the County or acquired from participating member municipalities and private sources. Through the establishment of policies and procedures, the Archives and Museum Program provides a standard for the acquisition, retention, preservation, promotion, access and use of all archival materials and artefacts entrusted to the care of the County.

Our Vision: To bring together people, partnerships and possibilities for a strong and vibrant Northumberland County.

Our Corporate Mission: To be a best practices leader of County government and a collaborative partner with our member municipalities, and community partners.

Our Institutional Mission: To be a best practices leader in community museums and archives and an effective collaborative partner with our member municipalities and community partners.

Northumberland County's Strategic Plan consists of four interconnected focus areas under which all goals and objectives are aligned:

- Economic Prosperity and Innovation
- Sustainable Growth
- Thriving and Inclusive Communities
- Leadership in Change

### Our History

The 'Northumberland County Archives and Museum' was first established as the Cobourg & District Historical Society Archives by a passionate group of volunteers in 1980. It began in a member's home, relocated to the Cobourg Armoury, and finally moved to the southwest corner of the C. Gordon King Centre in 1995 at 200 Ontario Street, Cobourg.

In 2011, the Cobourg & District Heritage Society announced that their volunteer base could no longer support the management of the growing archives collection. Upon this announcement, the Town of Cobourg and Northumberland County worked together with the Cobourg District Heritage Society to transfer



ownership and responsibility to Northumberland County in order to provide continued access and preservation of the valued collection.

Today, the partnership continues through the Town of Cobourg's provision of Northumberland County Archive & Museum's designated space in the C. Gordon King Centre (Cobourg Public Library).

Short- and long-term challenges experienced by NCAM staff at their current location in the Cobourg Public Library led to a needs-assessment and feasibility study to determine options for the future of the Northumberland County Archives and Museum.

Through community and professional consultations, a comprehensive analysis of the following options was completed:

- **Option 1: Remain at the current location in the Cobourg Public Library.** This option was discarded given the current challenges posed.
- **Option 2: Build a new stand-alone facility.** This is the most expensive option and was therefore rejected as unfeasible.
- **Option 3: Seek out another space within the community to rent/share.** An environmental scan revealed no suitable locations to rent/share space.
- **Option 4: Integrate the new NCAM into the GPL Redevelopment Project.** This is the most cost-effective option which also addresses the challenges NCAM is experiencing in its current space.

While Option 2 and Option 3 were discarded as unsuitable early in the assessment process, Option 1 and Option 4 were presented to County Council in August 2017.

In August 2017, County Council accepted the recommendation to integrate NCAM into the GPL Re-development project (Option 4).

In May 2019, the Northumberland County Council approved the rebranding of the Northumberland County Archives to become the **Northumberland County Archives and Museum (NCAM)** in order to more accurately reflect the program's current collection, services, and future business strategy.

## Section 2: Current State

The Northumberland County Archives and Museum (NCAM) professionally preserves and stores archival materials and artefacts in order to ensure that future generations have access to the information held in trust. NCAM is the official repository for the municipal records of the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand, the Municipality of Brighton, the Town of Cobourg and the Township of Cramahe, as well as a number of local organizations including the Cobourg Library Board, Codrington Women's Institute, and the Marie Dressler Foundation.

The NCAM team carries out the corporate vision and mission via the following core functions:

- Collection of archival materials and artefacts relevant to NCAMs collection mandate
- Protection of archival materials and artefacts for future generations
- Engagement with the public to facilitate the use of collection materials

### Collections Management

Activities within this core function include:

- Registering, cataloguing, and describing all incoming materials and related information, including loans and donations;
- Curating the collection in accordance with NCAM's accessioning policy;
- Utilizing preventive conservation techniques;
- Continually assessing and improving the collection's storage systems (rehousing materials, designing and constructing custom enclosures, improving efficiency of space);
- Maintaining NCAM's environmental and pest management programs;
- Reviewing, testing and updating the archives' emergency preparedness and disaster planning procedures on a regular basis;
- Managing and monitoring artefact and facility security;

### Curatorial Activities

NCAM's curatorial function includes the activities that support the research and development of collections and exhibits such as:

- Providing services to external customers (access to materials for research purposes, research assistance, loans, professional consultation etc.).
- Researching new acquisitions and artefacts and archival materials;
- Developing a collections plan for future acquisitions and long-term growth in accordance with NCAM's collections policy;
- Supervising all actions related to collection donations and purchases;
- Acquiring, recording, and researching the NCAM's collections;
- Consulting with archives and museums whose collecting interests overlap with NCAM's policies to avoid duplication of collecting and ensuring that the public interest is served (and materials go to the appropriate collection.)
- Managing, planning, and developing the exhibitions program by creating and/or supervising budgets, design, policies, procedures, and guidelines for exhibitions;
- Curating and developing temporary and permanent exhibition installations
- Collaborating with local organizations to facilitate community curated exhibitions

## Educational and Interpretive Programming

The role of programming is to impart knowledge and information, facilitate the visitor's search for meaning and relevance in relation to the collection and exhibits, and to assist visitors in making a personal connection with Northumberland County's heritage. NCAM is committed to welcoming individuals and groups into NCAM's space for engaging in hands-on learning opportunities, as well as outreach presentations throughout the region. Examples of NCAM's educational public programming activities include, but are not limited to:

- Doors Open. As an organizer and participant, in collaboration with the Ontario Heritage Trust, Northumberland Archives and Museum helps 'open the doors, gates and courtyards' of unique and fascinating local cultural sites to the public;
- Presentations about heritage to numerous community groups and organizations;
- Archives 101, an introductory Volunteer Training Course that encourages volunteerism and provides the basics of orientation;



- Participation in special events such as the Annual Brighton History Open House, The Way We Were, Cobourg, James Cockburn Day;

Delivery of curriculum-based educational programming to local elementary, secondary and post-secondary school classes, including Durham College's Library and Information Technician Program.

In June, 2020 Northumberland County Archives and Museum conducted a public engagement survey via JoinInNorthumberland, Northumberland County's online community engagement platform. The survey sought input from local residents about their awareness and impressions of NCAM and NCAM's services and sought insight into respondent's interests and expectations for future programs and exhibitions. The survey received 31 responses over 7 weeks.

The top ten community needs respondents expected NCAM to address were:

1. Space for exhibiting historical materials (28)
2. Programs for children (16)
3. Programs for teens/young adults (16)
4. Meeting space (15)
5. Programs for adults (14)
6. Programs for seniors (13)
7. Volunteer/training programs (13)
8. Build awareness of social inequities (13)
9. Cultural hub (12)
10. Space for exhibiting art (11)

Understanding needs and expectations identified by residents for the new facility can help NCAM tailor its programs and offerings to effectively serve our local community and visitors to Northumberland County.

Residents asked which exhibit themes they would like to explore. It was clear that residents want to understand the history and development of THIS area. They are searching for answers to questions like:

- 'What makes Northumberland County unique?'
- 'What was everyday life like for people living here throughout different eras?'
- 'What is the Indigenous history of this land?'
- 'How has colonialism impacted local Indigenous people in the past and today?'

- What are the untold stories of local women, immigrants, Black people, People of Colour, and other underrepresented groups?’
- ‘How has agriculture, industry and commerce developed in Northumberland County?’
- ‘Who has made contributions to art, music, industry, architecture, science, sports etc.?’
- ‘How has our local environment and landscape changed?’
- ‘How has religion played a role in this region?’
- ‘What stories does NCAM’s historical collection tell?’
- Understanding the interests of our residents will help guide exhibitions, programs and collecting activities.

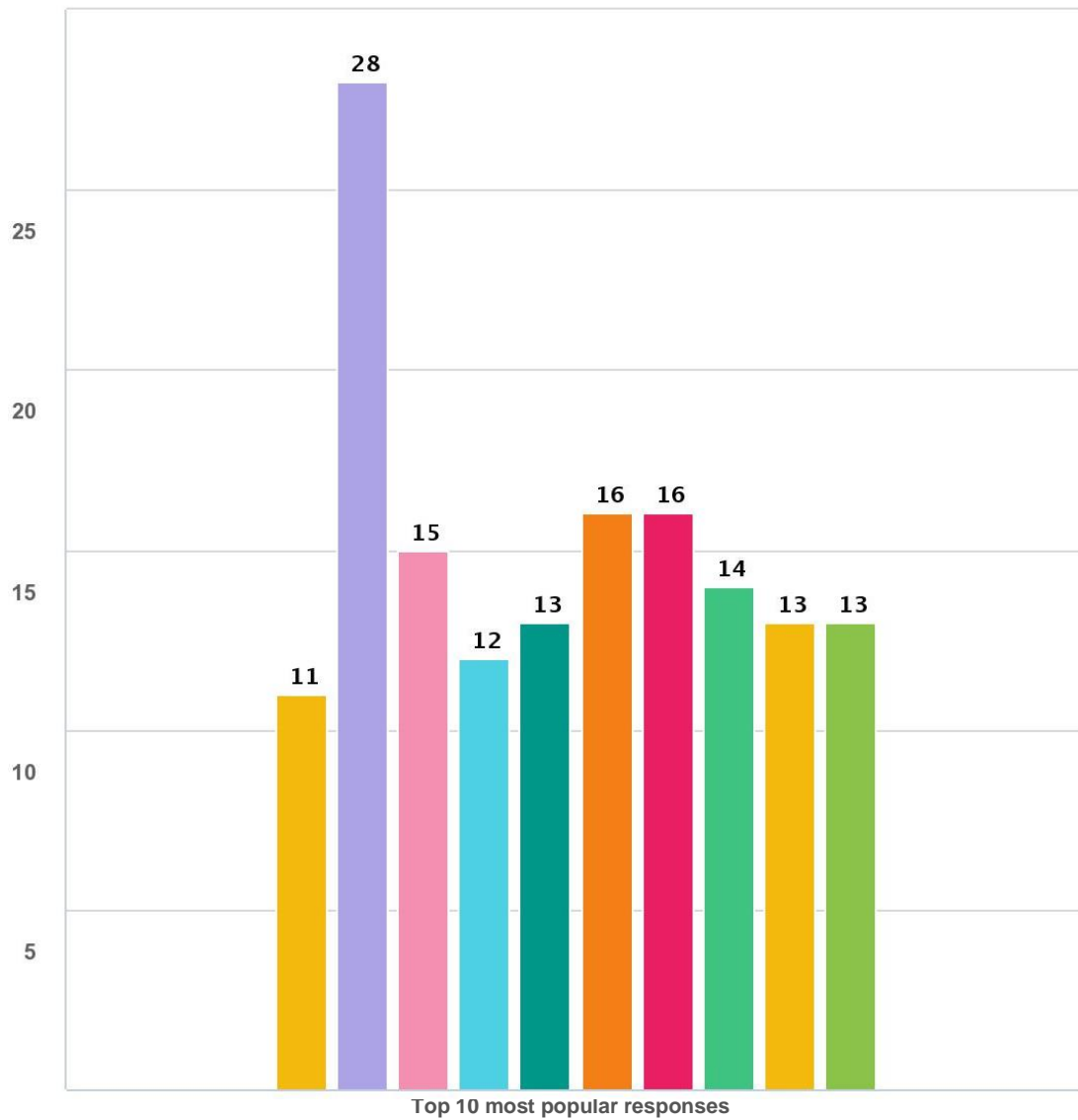
When asked what NCAM does well, respondents commended staff’s friendliness and communication as well as the institution’s ability to preserve local history. Notably, many respondents skipped this question, or answered they were unsure because they had not visited or accessed NCAM’s services. 11 respondents indicated they were not aware of NCAM.

When asked what NCAM could improve, a number of respondents noted space and hours of operation were a limitation. Availability of information about the collection and useful finding aids, access to holdings, and more proactive collecting activities were also identified as areas for improvement.

Residents were asked to select attributes that they believe describes NCAM. Thirteen individuals participated in this question. Respondents overwhelmingly selected ‘Responsible Stewards’ first, with ‘Authentic’ and ‘Connected’ being identified second and third most often followed equally by ‘Exploratory’ and ‘Inclusive’ and lastly, ‘Visitor-Centric’. 59% of respondents did not select any of the choices and 16% selected “I don’t know” and “none of the above”.

NCAM is privileged to be upgrading our facility and services to provide more space and available hours in the next two to three years. Following the direction laid out in this plan, NCAM will continue to work hard to improve the accessibility of our collection and engagement with our community to be recognized as a best practices leader for community museums and archives, a valued collaborative partner, responsible stewards, and authentic, connected, exploratory, inclusive and visitor-centric.

Which community needs would you expect NCAM to address?



**Question options**

(Click items to hide)

- Forum for community conversation
 ● Space for exhibiting art
- Space for exhibiting historical materials
 ● Meeting space
 ● Affordable entertainment
- Cultural hub
 ● Volunteer/training programs
 ● Support for newcomers
- Programs for children
 ● Programs for teens/young adults
 ● Programs for adults
- Programs for seniors
 ● Accessibility
 ● Food security
- Affordable transportation for school groups
 ● Economic development
- Use of environmentally sustainable products
 ● Build awareness of social inequities
- Build awareness of environmental issues
 ● Other (please specify)
 ● Poverty relief

## Section 3: NCAM Mission and Mandate

### Our Mission Statement

To be a best practices leader for community museums and archives and a collaborative partner with our member municipalities, and community.

The mission statement supports the County's organizational vision "To bring together people, partnerships and possibilities for a strong and vibrant Northumberland County" and serves to communicate purpose and direction to NCAM staff and to volunteers, visitors and stakeholders.

### Our Mandate

We collect, care for and provide access to archival materials and artefacts that represent the stories of the people, places and development of Northumberland County.

NCAM's mission and mandate will be accomplished via the following value statements:

- We will build a collection that reflects all of our local society, so that the preserved material culture of individuals, a community or an organisation can represent who we are and how we got here
- We will be an effective collaborative partner who brings value to institutional and community heritage and culture initiatives
- We will be a community hub for exploration, learning, discussion and development
- We will pursue professional excellence by continuously updating and sharing our knowledge and skills
- We will promote the widest possible access to our collections within the boundaries of relevant legislation, worldviews, and ethics
- We will protect the integrity of our collection and guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past
- We will uphold all applicable international conventions, federal and provincial legislation, treaty obligations, legally binding trusts or conditions relevant to collections and operations

The value statements are supported by the following guiding principles:

[Responsible Stewardship](#)

Our collections are preserved and accessible for the benefit of present and future generations.

[Visitor-centric](#)

We put the user experience at the centre of our processes.

[Inclusive](#)

We are welcoming, open, and representative of our diverse community.

[Authentic](#)

We are a trustworthy community partner and source of reliable historical evidence.

[Exploratory](#)

We nurture a culture of curiosity, creativity, and innovation.

[Connected](#)

We pursue relationships and relevance in our communities.



## Section 4: NCAM Strategy for 2020-2023

The following four objectives and accompanying strategic goals set the stage for NCAM's activities over the next four years:

1. Prepare for a sustainable future
  - a. Pursue capital funding for the new Archives and Museum and diversify funding streams to support its operation
  - b. Evaluate and implement the NCAM policy framework to represent industry best practices in archives and museums
  - c. Grow division structure and staffing complement to support preparations for transition to the new facility and sustain enhanced operations at a new, municipal archives and museum facility
  - d. Enhance NCAM brand strength to increase community awareness and engagement through a comprehensive marketing plan
  - e. Strengthen internal skills, knowledge and innovation through the professional development of staff and volunteers
2. Enhance collections stewardship and accessibility
  - a. Procure and launch collections management software
  - b. Review and evaluate the NCAM collection to identify gaps or underrepresented stories and identify materials for deaccession which do not meet NCAM's mandate
  - c. Prepare the collection for a safe transition to the new facility
  - d. Evaluate digital assets and develop a framework for digital preservation program
3. Build community partnerships and engagement
  - a. Conduct client research to understand the needs and expectations of our stakeholders
  - b. Engage in visible public consultation about exhibitions, programming and collecting activities
  - c. Develop and nurture relationships with diverse community stakeholders and member municipalities
  - d. Seek opportunities for learning and collaboration with our local Treaty partners to share and support truth, healing and the authentic representation of Indigenous voices

#### 4. Develop community-centric exhibitions and programming

- a. Enhance research capacity to facilitate archives and museum outreach activities
- b. Design and co-create community-first exhibitions in alignment with shared goals
- c. Recognize opportunities to engage external expertise to structure appropriate programs
- d. Employ diverse evaluation methods to measure the success of exhibition and programming initiatives

## Conclusion

This strategic plan presents an ambitious set of goals and strategies to guide Northumberland County Archives and Museum through the next 4 years of significant changes and developments.

This plan is at once a commitment to service and an invitation to our community members and stakeholders to engage with us as we work to collect, care for and provide access to archival materials and artefacts that represent the stories of the people, places and development of Northumberland County.

Through NCAM's dedication to authentic community connection, inclusivity, exploration, creativity and excellence in cultural stewardship and service, we hope, beyond the building of an outstanding cultural facility, to evolve to become a community cultural hub that is dear to the residents of and visitors to Northumberland County.