

Collaborating on Common Management Priorities

The Role of National Archives in Society

August 21, 2012, Brisbane, Australia

Summary

Introduction

On Tuesday, August 21, 2012, the Forum of National Archivists (FNA) held its second annual meeting in Brisbane, Australia. During this meeting, FNA members discussed a number of issues facing archives internationally.

Welcome and opening remarks

Mr. David Fricker, Director General, National Archives of Australia, welcomed delegates to the 2012 International Congress on Archives, and introduced Mr. Daniel J. Caron, Deputy Head and Librarian and Archivist of Canada, and Chair of the FNA.

Mr. Caron in turn welcomed FNA members to the meeting, underscoring national differences and common challenges faced by National Archivists worldwide. He also stressed the importance of the FNA as a mechanism for collaboration, and to share experiences and best practices. Mr. Caron reviewed the agenda for the day, and introduced the keynote speaker, Mr. Soungalo Ouattara, ministre de la Fonction publique, du travail et de la sécurité sociale in Burkino Faso.

Mr. Ouattara spoke to the importance of archives, and stressed the link between the archival function and good governance. He also shared with FNA members the lengths that Burkino Faso has gone to in order to achieve its democratic goals through the effective management of information. Finally, Mr. Ouattara underscored the importance of seeking engagement at political levels to support the functions associated with acquiring, preserving and providing access to records of the state.

Update on themes one year later

The FNA then followed-up on the series of themes introduced during the first Forum: open government and the role of archives; assessing the value of archives in the digital age; and the trusted digital repository.

1. Open government

Mr. Caron reviewed the results of the open government survey, and noted that participation in open government initiatives had grown with activities becoming increasingly concrete.

Mr. David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States of America, then updated the FNA members on USA action plans. FNA members discussed the differences between the concepts of open data and open government, and agreed on the importance of developing further clarity on issues associated with each.

2. Modern appraisal for digital information resources

Mr. Martin Berendse, National Archivist of the Netherlands and President of the International Council of Archives, and Mr. Caron, each made presentations on modern approaches to appraisal and acquisition. Members agreed that the assessment of value in the digital age demands new approaches. Case studies from the Netherlands and Canada demonstrated clearly that valuation must occur upstream in the supply chain, and the Canadian approach evidenced a departure from macro-appraisal, and the adoption of a pan-societal approach to assigning value to information resources.

3. Update on the development of trusted digital repositories

Mr. Asbjørn Hellum, National Archivist and Director of the Danish National Archives, and Mr. Greg Goulding, Chief Archivist and General Manager of the Archives New Zealand, each made presentations on the trusted digital repository (TDR), and demonstrated that solutions are being implemented in some countries. Both Denmark and New Zealand expect to have fully functioning TDRs within the span of a year. FNA members agreed that nations must remain committed to TDR development. They also expressed the importance of engaging developers of information technology solutions to ensure that archival requirements are taken into consideration.

FNA members also introduced two new themes: description for access; and competencies for the digital age.

4. Making information accessible and descriptive standards for unpublished material

Mr. David Fricker, Director General of the National Archives of Australia, made a presentation on crowdsourcing, and discussed an approach where descriptive information is created by users of archives online, and then acquired by the National Archives of Australia and integrated within their holdings to further increase accessibility. FNA members congratulated Australia on this approach, and agreed that further updates on this work would be of value to the Forum.

5. Skills and competencies for the selection of materials in the digital age

Mr. Masaya Takayama, President of the National Archives of Japan, made a presentation on work being undertaken in Japan relative to the development of training and educational material for information professionals. Mr. Takayama noted that new skills were being fostered in these information professionals. These skills include analysis, strong oral and written communication skills, and planning and project management skills. Mr. Takayama also stressed the importance of continuing to develop skills as the digital environment evolves to ensure that professional competencies remain in step.

Roundtable dialogue on issues of mutual interest

Next, the FAN held a roundtable on issues of mutual interest, including FNA goals and objectives, the importance of effective communication and a clear voice for National Archivists within the International Council of Archives (ICA). FNA members also discussed the ICA constitution and membership.

Closing remarks

Mr. Daniel J. Caron, Mr. David Fricker and Mr. Martin Berendse delivered closing remarks to Forum members. In short, FNA members agreed to continue next year with annual updates on the five themes, and to use working sessions between annual meetings to further develop solutions. Canada will develop a mechanism to share information over the course of the year.