

**Constrained Futures: Factors affecting public library engagement with  
community archives**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **Research Problem:**

Within the New Zealand context, recent research suggests that while community archive content accounts for only a small amount of holdings in public libraries in New Zealand, these institutions are among the best located to provide focused and strategic support for community archives, and have much to contribute to ensuring the sustainability of these collections. How institutions plan and implement this, and the factors that affect their ability to do so, remains a significant gap in the scholarship on the subject. This study identifies the factors that affect the ability of institutions, in this case public libraries, to provide support to community archives.

### **Methodology:**

This study employs a qualitative approach to address the research problem. Structured long-form interviews were conducted with six heritage staff from the Heritage Unit of Auckland Libraries.

### **Results:**

A limitation of this study was the small sample population of library staff. Regarding the factors affecting public library support of community archives; the study found that public libraries face a significant challenge to address the constraints of institutional policies that impact on their support of community archives, but that opportunities for collaboration provide the means to overcome these challenges.

### **Implications:**

This research contributes to the dialogue about community archives in the New Zealand context. It provides an understanding of the ability of public library institutions to contribute to the sustainability of community archives, and provides an analysis of the challenges faced by staff when navigating the challenges posed by this relationship. The research also acknowledges that despite the challenges, the development of new collaborative initiatives provides insight into future pathways for engagement between institution and community archives.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the primary things the public library has to offer its community is local identity. By creating a structure that will help people feel more connected to their local history, and more historically literate, we are fulfilling a fundamental institutional role (Todd Stephens in Shull, p.32).

Traditionally, public libraries have been viewed as well-resourced institutions with access to budgets, skilled staff, facilities and a host of systems to support the management and distribution of information. Because of this, cultural institutions like public libraries, museums and large archives are often aligned with the interests of community archives, and therefore are believed to be a natural source of support and resources for them. However, even if the will to provide support is present, often the way to provide it is beyond the available mandate and resources of even large institutions (Welland, 2015). The ability of public libraries to remain relevant to their communities and meet the demands of an ever-changing demographic is determined by the interplay of several institutional factors.

A case-study of the Heritage Unit of Auckland Libraries examines these factors, which include the framework of institutional policy, alongside digital capability, access and discovery, engagement, preservation, and funding to determine how internal challenges influence the institutional response to community archives. It also considers how collaboration is used to overcome these challenges and enable an effective institutional response to the needs of community archives, and considers the contribution community archives can make to achieving strategic outcomes.

## 2. Definition of key terms

**Collection:** Collections are defined as groups of material – both tangible and intangible – that are purposely acquired, organised, described and preserved, and that form a meaningful whole. Collections differ from the archival concept of *fonds* in that their individual parts do not necessarily originate from the same source; their significance is not contingent on their provenance.

**Archives:** The research draws on the definition of archives provided by Newman (2010): Archives are “records of organisations and individuals that have been selected for indefinite retention on the basis of their continuing value for legal, administrative, financial or historical research purposes” (Bettington, Ebehard, Loo, & Smith, p.663).

**Community archives:** For this research, Newman’s general definition of community archives was used as a working definition: ‘Community archives are collections of archival records that originate in a community – that is, a group of people who live in the same location or share other forms of community of interest – and whose collection, maintenance and use involves the active participation of that community’ (Newman, 2010, p.8)

### **3. Literature review and theoretical framework**

The subject of community archives is well documented in the literature. Dialogue on the nature of community archives and their role in supporting the history and identity of the communities they represent has increased their visibility in both academic and industry literature, as the social and historical value attributed to these collections becomes progressively more established in the vernacular of the heritage and archive sectors.

Much light has been shone on the factors that affect community archives. Two studies by Flinn (2007, 2010) and the recent body of work produced by Newman (2010, 2012) provide a particularly relevant framework in which to locate this study, due to their discussion of engagement between community archives and the archives sector, and identification of the factors that affect the sustainability of community archives.

Until recently, research on community archives in New Zealand has been limited. Two major studies conducted since 2010 by Newman (2010) and Welland (2015) have addressed this gap and provided a foundation for further research in the national and regional context.

#### **3.1 Definition of community archives**

The task to define what community archives are is a common theme in the literature (Flinn, 2007; Jura Consultants, 2009; Welland, 2015). The challenge is described by Flinn (2007), who states:

Defining and establishing a common understanding of the terms employed in this area is important but also quite difficult. Definitions of what a community might be, or what a community archive is and what it might be taken to include are not necessarily clear or fixed. Indeed, these terms might go unused and unrecognized by many working in community projects and in mainstream archive and heritage institutions.

The discourse on how to define community archives covers two themes. The first is the requirement for the subject matter to be a community of people – either in



the same location, or with a shared community of interest (Jura consultants, 2009).

The second theme is concerned with the engagement of communities in the process of creation, maintenance and use of their collections (Flinn et al, 2010; Schull, 2015; Welland, 2015). These themes are echoed by Flinn (2010), who defines community archives as collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control. The themes are also apparent in the definition provided by Newman (2010):

Community archives are collections of archival records that originate in a community – that is, a group of people who live in the same location or share other forms of community of interest – and whose collection, maintenance and use involves active participation of that community.

This definition is adopted in a subsequent national study by Sarah Welland (2015).

A draft Memorandum of Understanding between Auckland Council Archives and Auckland Libraries (2011) provides a definition of community archives based on Flinn (2008), which is expanded to include Māori and other organisations:

Community archives come in many different forms and seek to document the history of all manner of local, occupational, ethnic, faith and other diverse communities, including community organisations other organisations (both commercial and non-commercial), Māori, iwi, hapu and individuals. Community archives collect, preserve and make accessible: documents, photographs, oral histories and many other materials of a non-government nature, which document the histories of particular groups, individuals and localities.

This definition identifies the community component of the definition, but excludes the participatory element.

### **3.2 Factors affecting community archives**

The increase in awareness of community archives has prompted investigation into factors that impact on the creation, management and use of these collections. Recent New Zealand studies have identified significant factors affecting community archives (Newman, 2010; Welland, 2015).

Newman's study of sustainability in community archives identifies the significant factors that are required for these collections to be sustainable. These include: The archives themselves and their ability to endure over time; the management or custodial structure supporting the archives over the long term; and the ability of the archives to remain relevant to the community over time; the nature of the collections, the Archivist, and the level of external support. These factors are included as part of a Sustainability Model that provides two lists of characteristics; those that are absent or low, and therefore not likely to be sustainable, and those that are present, and therefore likely to be sustainable.

Findings by Welland (2015) identify ten categories that could have major influence on community archives in the next ten years. These include funding, digital archiving, collaboration, staffing, training and professional engagement, standards, wider environment, governance, marketing and community engagement, and access.

### **3.3 Solutions for community archives**

Several international studies place emphases on the role of institutions in supporting community archives (Flinn, 2010; Schull, 2015; Jura Consultants, 2009). In the national context, however, findings outlined in an article by Newman (2012) state that 'external support provided in New Zealand is not making any significant contribution to the sustainability of community archives'. In her earlier study, Newman identifies the need for further research into how agencies can provide support, and which agencies are the most appropriate to deliver this support.

A way to address the issues that community archives face may be found in the large body of international research that explores themes of cooperation, collaboration and convergence in the GLAM sector (Dupont, 2007; Yarrow et al, 2008; Duff et al, 2013; Novia, 2012; Lidman, 2012; Zorich et al, 2008).

Similarly, several recent studies have investigated elements of GLAM sector cooperation and convergence in the New Zealand context (Wellington, 2013; Oliver, 2010; Goss, 2016).

Despite the lack of specific reference to community archives in the scope of these larger investigations, themes explored in the research present solutions to the issues affecting community archives. In particular, discussions of collaborative paradigms are particularly relevant, and are well documented in the international and national literature (Zorich, 2008; Yarrow et al, 2008, Wellington, 2013; Schull, 2015).

Much of the narrative on collaboration locates itself within the collaborative continuum framework (Wellington, 2013; Yarrow et al, 2008, Zorich, 2008), where the five stages – contact, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and convergence – provide the structure for an analysis of the relationship between GLAM entities. This study concerns itself less with the concept of full transformative collaboration as posed in the research (Zorich et al, 2008; Wellington, 2013), but more with those at the beginning of the continuum: contact, cooperation and coordination. This is best summarized in Zorich et al (2008), who suggests that ‘broadly, speaking, collaboration refers to a process in which two or more groups work together toward a common goal by sharing expertise, information and resources’.

In the case of community archives, any collaborative process needs to acknowledge the community’s right to autonomy over their archives, and facilitate their involvement with them, as part of the post-donation process or the agreement between the institution and the community to establish a relationship. This action underpins one of the defining characteristics of community archives,

which, as Flinn (2007) describes, requires the active participation of the community in documenting, recording and exploring its heritage, and in which community ownership and control of these projects is essential (Flinn, 2008).

### **3.4 Public library institutions and community archives**

An increasing body of research examines engagement between communities and public libraries (MLA, 2012; Flinn, 2007; Schull, 2015, Copeland, 2015). A recent publication by Shull (2015) goes some way to address the gap. In a major study of how public library archivists and special collections librarians in the United States are engaging with their communities and stakeholders, Shull employs case-studies to demonstrate the use of community archive collections as a way of connecting patrons with historically or culturally significant collections (Schull, 2015).

A recent study by Copeland (2015) examines how public libraries can be repositories for digital community archives. The study builds a case for public libraries' developing digital community archives that are participatory, with emphasis on born-digital items rather than on physical items that have been digitized (p.12).

In New Zealand, very little research has examined the relationship between public libraries and community archives in any meaningful way. A survey of community archives by Archives New Zealand (2008) reported that at the time, 7% of community archives were held in public library institutions, though this statistic has not been significantly explored since.

Evidence of cooperative and collaborative projects at a regional level provide examples that go some way to support this study. These include the Wairarapa Archives (Green, 2012), Tauranga Memories (Tauranga City Libraries, 2016), and Recollect (Upper Hutt City Library, 2016). However, no significant formal studies of community archive involvement with public libraries in New Zealand have been conducted. Jehly (2013) has examined the management of community

archives and museums in the New Zealand context, and the findings from this research of a correlated heritage institution are useful to this study.

### **3.5 Institutional policy**

#### **3.5.1 Public Library Policy**

Existing public library policy in New Zealand contains limited reference to community archives. Of the current collection policies for Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill, only Auckland Libraries (2012) and Invercargill City Libraries and Archives (ICLA, 2013) specifically refer to community archives within the collection scope. ICLA's Archives Collection Development Policy covers the management of community archives, which include the collection scope, acquisition appraisal and access. The ICLA's Community Archives Donation Agreement (2013) transfers control and custody of the collection to the Library unless otherwise negotiated at the time of donation.

Dunedin Public Libraries (2012) collection policy accounts for the collection of unpublished records of individuals and organisations with historical significance from within the Otago and Southland region, though does not specifically identify community archives. Instead, the policy states that the library heritage collection is representative rather than comprehensive. Evidence of some engagement with community archive collections by related regional collecting institutions is evident in Wellington and Dunedin, where scope for the acquisition of community archives is included in Wellington City Archives (2000) policy, and shared interest in collecting areas with Otago University's Hocken Library is acknowledged in Dunedin Public Library (2012) policy.

The literature suggests that to be effective, the practical and subjective relationship with community archives need to be acknowledged, defined and written into the operational structures that govern institutions; in policy documents that include collection management policies, job descriptions, outreach

policies and budgets to create a paradigm for a tangible partnership with community archives.

### **3.5.2 Auckland Libraries policy**

Four key documents provide the contextual basis for the discussion of Auckland Libraries institutional policy in this case study: The Auckland Plan (Auckland Council, 2015) Auckland Libraries Scoping Paper for Community Archives Outreach (2012), Auckland Libraries Collection Development Policy (2013), and Auckland Libraries Te Kauroa – Future Framework 2013-2023 (2013).

The Auckland Plan (Auckland Council, 2015) outlines Auckland Council’s vision for Auckland for the next ten years. Several of the plan’s strategic directions support Auckland Libraries’ strategic document Te Kauroa – Future Directions (2013), which includes the creation of a ‘strong, inclusive and equitable society that ensure opportunities for all Aucklanders’, and ‘Integrating arts, culture and heritage into our daily lives’ (Auckland Libraries, 2013, p.11). In response, Te Kauroa specifies six key areas of focus, including heritage and research. The key outcome for the focus area is ‘Auckland’s unique stories shared and celebrated’, with two key directions being to ‘Broaden the collections to reflect the diversity of Auckland’s identity’, and ‘Increase the access to and visibility of our heritage collections’ (Auckland Libraries, 2013, p.16). These directions are further broken down into priorities, which features the involvement of local communities in collecting and telling their stories, extending access to digitised resources, and building sustainable partnerships with other documentary heritage institutions for access, storage and preservation of Auckland heritage.

Collaboration and co-operation are also identified as key to achieving the vision set out in The Auckland Plan (2015). Te Kauroa further specifies a commitment to strategic partnership with others who have similar goals, including regional collaborations with other collecting agencies in the heritage field and private

sector. Importance is also placed on the creation of ‘strong relationships with Pacific peoples and other ethnicities in Auckland’ (Auckland Libraries, 2013, p.43).

The draft Scoping Paper for Community Archives Outreach (Auckland Libraries, 2012) states that:

Auckland Libraries is committed to sourcing, recording, preserving and improving public customer access to community archive materials and taonga of long-term historic value to Aucklanders. Auckland Libraries also supports the retention of community archives within the community in both formal and more informal (i.e. institutional and domestic) settings.

The scoping paper identifies the broad principles of collaboration as a potential way to provide support to community archives, and briefly considers the various forms this support could take. These include use of premises, digital storage and maintenance, sharing of expertise, funding, and advisory services.

These principles reflect the strategic focus outlined in *Te Kauroa – Future Directions* (Auckland Libraries, 2013), the 10-year plan developed to address key areas of focus across the library network in the Auckland region. *Te Kauroa* (Auckland Libraries, 2013) identifies heritage and research and the digital library as two areas of focus, and provides strategic outcomes and directions for each of the focus areas (Auckland Libraries, 2013). It considers how, by broadening the context that heritage collections within public libraries operate in to include greater interaction with community archives, many of the issues can be addressed. The plan also addresses changes in technology, demographics, and communities.

Three additional documents provide insight of the management and scope of Auckland Libraries heritage collections. The Sir George Grey Special Collections Management Policy (2015) covers the management of community archives, and establishes the institutional context for the regional collection of archives, as well as the conditions around donation. The Collections Profiles for the South

Auckland Research Centre (2016) and West Auckland Research Centre (2016) describe the heritage collections, discuss conditions for collection and donation of archives and manuscripts, and summarise digital resources; though only scant reference is given to their interpretation and use.

### **3.6 Theoretical frameworks**

Two studies provide the theoretical framework for this research:

#### **3.6.1 Sustainability Model for Community Archives**

Newman (2010) provides a model to measure the sustainability of community archives. The model identifies three key aspects of community archives that need to be sustained over time: the organisation, the archives, and the community connection. To determine levels of institutional responsiveness for collaboration, the model provides two lists of characteristics; those that are absent or low, and therefore not likely to be sustainable, and those that are present, and therefore likely to be sustainable.

The characteristics for collaboration are particularly relevant to this study. This describes the characteristics to achieve high level of sustainability:

- Co-ordinates and co-operates with other Archives to ensure systematic documentation of community's history & achieve collection goals
- Co-operates with other repositories to achieve other goals, for example, services, expertise, preservation, and public programmes

#### **3.6.2 The Collaborative Continuum**

The Collaborative Continuum developed by Zorich, Waibel and Erway (2008) provides a model to examine collaborative processes and behaviours within LAM (Libraries, Archives, Museums) institutions in a uniform way, in which the



various points along the continuum are used to mark significant shifts in the collaborative process. As the points move from left to right, the complexity of the collaboration increases, the investment of effort becomes more significant, and the risks increase accordingly (Zorich, et al, 2008, p. 10).

The points on the continuum are: **Contact**: Initial engagement to establish dialogue and explore commonalities in activities and needs; **Cooperation**: An agreement between LAM's to work informally on an activity that provides a small, yet tangible benefit such as information sharing and undertaking an activity on behalf of partners; **Coordination**: Moves away from an ad-hoc arrangement to one that requires a framework to organise efforts and arrange who does what, and where; **Collaboration**: Moves beyond agreements to a process of shared creation to create something new; **Convergence**: the point where collaboration around a specific function or ideas becomes so extensive it morphs into a critical structure.

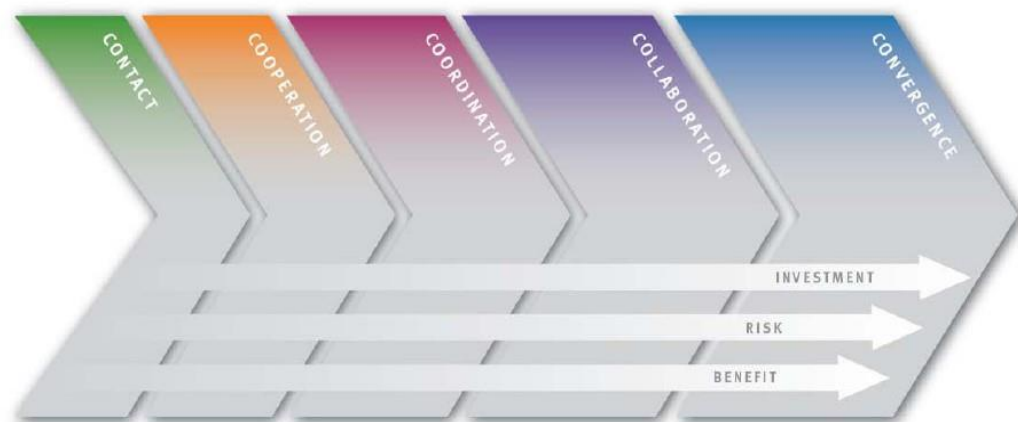


Figure 1: The Collaboration Continuum

By comparing the collaborative activity from the findings with the characteristics of each point on the continuum, a measure of the level of collaboration and its complexity, level and risk are determinable.

#### 4. Problem statement and research objectives

The research questions for this study were based on the factors identified in the literature review and in the methodological frameworks. The questions were:

- a. What are the factors affecting community archives?
- b. What support can public libraries provide community archives?
- c. What factors within libraries affect how this support is provided?
- d. How can collaboration be used by libraries to support community archives?

The desire for individuals and groups to create and share material that reflects their culture and identity, and document their stories in ways inherently meaningful to them, has led to an increase in recognition of the significance of community archives (Flinn, 2007). Within the information management profession and in the archive sector, that focus is greater now than ever before, thanks in part to international and national research that has grown the awareness of community archives and the knowledge that without them, we diminish our ability to understand where we have come from (Newman, 2012).

The growing awareness of community archives has expedited the discussion about factors that affect the maintenance of community archives. In New Zealand, recent research identifies factors that affect the viability of these collections, in particular the impact of inadequate resources, knowledge, trained staff, access, storage and funding on the ability of community archives to be sustainable (Newman, 2010; Wellington, 2013; Flinn, 2007).

Newman (2012) has cited institutional support as one response to the problems faced by community archives, though the question as to what form this support would take and which institutions are most able to provide it is yet to be fully answered. Also required is further investigation of the impact of operational realities on the ability of institutions to sustain these collections, where the level of collaboration required is beyond the mandate and resourcing of even large institutions (Welland, 2015). As Copeland (2015) suggests, is it not typical for public libraries to provide consultation on digital preservation or organisational practices.

Investigations into collaborative practice within cultural heritage institutions that include galleries, libraries, archives and museums (often referred to as GLAM or LAM sector organisations) provides analysis of how these institutions can work together to bridge gaps between professional and institutional silos (Dupont, 2007), although the scope of these studies does not allow room for meaningful dialogue about community archives, which sit just outside of the discourse that for the most part focus on collections already in situ.

The present GLAM sector milieu does however provide theoretical and practical concepts that are equally relevant to community archives. Within the New Zealand context, recent research suggests that while public library institutions in New Zealand account for only a small amount of community archives holdings, these institutions are among the best located to provide focused and strategic support for community archives, and have much to contribute to ensuring the sustainability of these collections. How they plan and implement this, and the factors that affect their ability to do so, remains a significant gap in the scholarship on the subject. This study identifies the factors that affect the ability of institutions, in this case public libraries, to provide support to community archives.

This case-study will show why collaboration with community archives is only sustainable when the engagement is clearly defined in organisational policy.

#### **4.1 Research objectives**

The objective of this study is to answer two questions; ‘What factors affect public libraries support for community archives?’ and ‘How can public libraries support the sustainability of community archives?’. To do this, it will identify the internal factors affecting how libraries engage with community archives, and then compare these against the factors affecting community archives as identified by Newman (2010) and Welland (2015). These will then be considered against the collaborative continuum model (defined in 3.6.2) to determine whether collaboration can contribute to the sustainability of community archives, and at

what level of the continuum this activity occurs. The findings from this study can potentially provide recommendations for the design and implementation of a process or model to enable public libraries to contribute more effectively to the sustainability of community archives in New Zealand.

## **5. Research design and methodology**

### **5.1 Methodology**

The common case as defined by Yin (2014) is the rationale for data collection and analysis in this study. A case study is the preferred method for use in this instance because of its suitability based on the factors outlined by Yin (2014), where the case study is preferred when examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. A case study adds direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events.

A division within a large public library institution was selected as the unit of analysis for the case study. The division is responsible for heritage and research services across the region, and comprises four regional research centres, special collections, digital services, and a preservation unit.

Internal validity was determined using pattern matching. Reliance on a single case meant that generalisations were narrow, but were corroborated with the patterns established in the theoretical framework provided by Newman (2010), Welland (2015) and Zorich et al (2008). Explanation building was used to identify causal links in the data. Reliability of the case was determined using case study protocol that employed the same data collection procedure with the same questions used for each interview conducted.

## **5.2 Population sample**

This study is carried out using a sample of staff from a large public library institution, in this case the Heritage and Research Unit of Auckland Libraries. The unit comprises four research centres based in West Auckland, North Auckland, South Auckland and Central Auckland, as well as Sir George Grey Special Collections based at Auckland Central Library, and the Chelsea Sugar Refinery Archive, based at Birkenhead Library in Auckland. The unit also includes a digital services team, and a preservation unit.

The selection process to obtain this sample employed prior knowledge of sample subjects gained via existing formal relationships with the researcher.

## **5.3 Human ethics considerations**

Ethics approval was obtained from Victoria University's Ethics Committee, in accordance with the University's Human Ethics Policy (2016).

Participants were sent a Participant Information Sheet outlining the purpose of the study, method of data collection and information about confidentiality and the disposal of data provided by them. Before conducting interviews, signed, informed, written consent was acquired from all research participants.

Participants were advised that they could pull out of the research at any time and for any reason, without explanation, before the completion of data analysis. They were also advised that any information provided by them would not be accessed by anyone other than the researcher and research supervisor.

There was no deception involved in the research. As much information as practicable was provided to participants prior to conducting the interviews, and every effort was made to answer any questions they had about their involvement in the study.

Participants were offered a summary of the research findings upon its completion.

#### **5.4 Data collection**

In this study, I have used purposive sampling, based on those participants having knowledge of, or responsibility for, collections that identify as community archives per the definition used in this study. Individuals are selected based on 1: their affiliation as a full time staff members at the time of sampling of at least one year's tenure at one of the six research centres at Auckland Libraries (as defined above), who, 2: hold direct responsibility for the management of, or direct responsibility for, archive and manuscript collections - either as a team leader of a research centre as defined above, or as a manuscript librarian, research librarian or archivist; and/or 3: have current responsibility for, or the scope within their position to allow for, formal or informal engagement with community archives or community archive content.

In this study, I will conduct prolonged case-study interviews to determine; 1: factors at an institutional level that affect Auckland Libraries engagement with community archives; 2: the current level of unit engagement with community archives, and 3: the individual behaviours and perceptions that affect relationships with community archives organisations.

This evidence will also be collected from strategic and operational Auckland Libraries policy documents that will 1: determine how the policy framework supports or hinders the existing relationship with community archives organisations, and 2: how this framework can be improved to achieve desired outcomes that support cooperation and collaboration with community archives.

#### **5.5 Delimitations**

This study concentrates on a single unit within a New Zealand public library institution only.

## **5.6 Limitations**

This study does not extend to other public library institutions, or to other libraries outside of local government control. This includes academic libraries, church and non-governmental business libraries, and libraries controlled by central government agencies.

## **6. Data analysis**

### **6.1 Analysis - qualitative data**

Interviews were transcribed, and the content searched to identify prominent themes. The themes were derived by identifying the subjects that featured across all interviews, where opinions were recurrent. Once the themes were established the findings were analysed against the themes identified in the methodological framework (established in 3.6) to determine patterns of similarity and difference. Some themes were expanded due to their significance, and others were added or re-prioritised due to their prominence in the discussion. The technique used is defined by Yin (2014) as a method of analysis called pattern-matching, where similarity of results when compared with patterns predicted in earlier research can help a case study to improve its internal validity. In this case study, literal replication was used to determine patterns in the evidence, and combined with theoretical replication to draw conclusions with the external context established by the framework.

## **7. Findings**

This section presents the findings from the interviews to identify the major factors that affect their roles, and that impact on engagement with community archives.

## **7.1 Institutional policy**

### **7.1.1 Collection policy**

All interviewees viewed the lack of a regional collection development and collection management policy as a significant issue for the Heritage Unit. Most mentioned the need for a regional policy to help the Heritage Unit to operate more strategically, and to fill the gaps in the existing framework of individual collection development policies that maintain much of the fragmented pre-amalgamation structure. The post-amalgamation environment was considered by some as a major reason for why this policy work has not yet been completed, citing gaps in digital skills, staff turnover and a lack of leadership by management as the main factors affecting progress in this area.

Issues arising from the inadequate policy and process for managing digital collections was similarly concerning for all. The uneven distribution of resources in the post-amalgamation environment was frequently cited as a probable cause for why the management of digital collections has not kept up with requirements, and was agreed by most to have had an impact on Libraries' ability to achieve strategic goals. The issues raised by most concerned the lack of process and standards around digitisation, the creation and maintenance of born digital content, digital preservation (including formatting, storage and migration), digitising existing collections, access and discovery, and addressing copyright and privacy.

### **7.1.2 Defining community archives**

Achieving agreement on a definition for community archives was stated by most interviewees to be problematic, particularly when attempting to define community archives in relation to existing heritage collections, and when locating them



within the framework of institutional and collection management policy. Interviewees provided a range of responses when asked to define what they believed community archives to be. Four interviewees offered a more prescribed definition of community archives as being non-governmental records, specifically non-public and distinct from central, local and regional government. Some also considered them to be material that falls outside the collecting scope of major heritage institutions. Two responses defined community archives by the content of the collections, and one response identified the distinction between collecting the physical material and engaging the community in its management and use. Not all agreed with the definition provided by Newman (2010), and some considered it too narrow in scope to be applied to Auckland Libraries heritage collections.

### **7.1.3 Current scope of collections**

All interviewees identified that the current scope of the heritage collections does not reflect the diverse communities served by Auckland Libraries, and that gaps in the current collections exist due to policy not keeping up with the changes in Auckland's demographic. A common view to come out of the interviews was the belief that Auckland Libraries, as a ratepayer funded institution, is obligated to collect material that is of relevance to Auckland, particularly that which is unique. Some stated the need to have greater awareness of other institutions collecting policies and focus Library resources on the material that is of greatest significance to Aucklanders. This view was in stark contrast to others, which maintained that as a major national heritage repository, Auckland Libraries has a responsibility to acquire and preserve more than just Auckland-centric material.

Acquisition of community archives was mentioned by some as a way to increase the diversity of Auckland Libraries collections, and concern was noted that the lack of flexibility in Auckland Libraries donation agreement policy would constrain the ability of community archives to retain a level of autonomy over the

access and use of their collections, post donation. Some strongly supported open ownership agreements with Auckland Libraries, particularly where concerned with the transfer of copyright and control over the use of their collections. Several interviewees also raised concerns that an overly pragmatic donation agreement policy would be detrimental to the ability of library staff to build relationships with communities who have little experience or trust of library institutions. Others emphasised the need to adhere to standard donation agreements to conserve resources, maintain accessibility, and ensure fiscal accountability.

## **7.2 Engagement**

Interviews revealed that the type of engagement that occurs between the community and the Heritage Unit is predominately to offer training and guidance. This activity is with historical societies, local history groups, and small local museums, and with special interest groups such as genealogists, residents and ratepayer's associations. Some interviewees acknowledge that this current engagement activity fits a generic pattern that they describe as a well-worn path, where the culture and demographic of the groups are similar, and are a common 'fit' with the current collections. Interviewees mentioned that a move away from this pattern requires staff to be aware of the need to make themselves available and share resources equitably across a broader spectrum of the community, but also the need for the library to increase financial investment and employ people with a wider range of experience to help fill the gaps.

Several interviewees were of the view that part of their role as heritage professionals is to increase communities' awareness around the significance of their collections and the importance of capturing their content. Two interviewees mentioned that the communities they engage with have little understanding of the value of their collections, and do not consider them to have meaning outside of their immediate community.

Many felt their role was about empowering communities by sharing knowledge, skills and resources to enable them to ‘do it for themselves’ and to make sure they have the right tools to be able to sustain their collections. Transferring knowledge of archival practice was viewed by some as one way to ensure efficient use of staff resources by enabling communities to retain their collections in situ and benefit from the value of those collections, rather than transferring that value to the library. Some interviewees mentioned the need to be pragmatic when carrying out this type of engagement activity, as the burden on existing workloads can be prohibitive.

Other engagement activity mentioned by staff was to assist with the interpretation and use of their collections, which was found to occur on an ad-hoc basis.

## **7.3 Preservation**

### **7.3.1 Digital preservation**

Many interviewees singled out digital preservation as a significant cause for concern, and identified the task to manage the proliferation of born-digital content as the major challenge for the Heritage Unit to overcome. The accessioning of born-digital material was identified as a major challenge for Auckland Libraries, due to the inability to control the quality of the files being created. Many interviewees described the current process to manage digital preservation as ad-hoc, with one interviewee calling the current environment an ‘ill-defined and shifting space’. Many also expressed frustration at the reliance on Council IT or external providers to manage storage, which meant the preservation needs of the Heritage Unit were subject to external forces that required resource to navigate.

All interviewees agreed that Libraries have a role to play in supporting digital sustainability for community archives. Of most concern was the ability of community archives to create and maintain their digital and born digital content,

and many identified the lack of a clear strategy as a barrier to providing a coordinated institutional response to these issues.

### **7.3.2 Storage**

Storage for physical collections was a concern for many, with much of the storage capacity for physical material within the Heritage Unit described as being at full capacity. Some interviewees describe how their need to manage storage requirements has meant tighter standards for appraisal and selection, where only a representative selection of material or objects is accepted over a complete collection. Storage constraints were also mentioned by some as a reason for engaging with community archives around improving their ability to store their collections on site, as opposed to donating them to the library. Several interviewees cited the impact of changes in the socio-economic and demographic identity of communities on the sustainability of some groups, because of the need for the library to salvage those collections and find appropriate storage for them.

## **7.4 Access and discovery**

All interviewees identified access and discovery as a significant issue for the Heritage Unit. Most were concerned that the reliance on legacy databases from pre-amalgamation was a barrier to access, compounded by inconsistent metadata standards across the region and the reliance of staff on the creation of interim records to describe collections. Some interviewees mentioned the implications of digital material in the online environment on privacy and copyright, and the ability of the Library to adequately manage that challenge in the present context.

Others pointed out issues with capacity and slow download speeds for the websites, the quality of presentation for online digital content, and the backlog of arrangement and description.

## 7.5 Staff

All interviewees commented that workload and time constraints were factors that affected their roles. Some stated the difficulty they had with managing the multiple elements of their roles, which included managing collection processing backlog, creating projects for community engagement and outreach, curating exhibitions, completing funding applications and other work-related paperwork, networking both internally and externally, attending meetings and training, attending conferences, delivering workshops, managing relationships with donors, and selecting material for digitisation. Some described working after hours on their own time to appraise collections for potential donation or attend events. These factors were identified as the main reasons by interviewees for why they need to be pragmatic when working with donors and taking on engagement activities.

Some interviewees mentioned the challenge of adapting to changes within the heritage sector, and how they felt these impacted on their roles personally. The changes most pertinent for staff included the need to upskill in dealing with digital collections, website content and access, and to have the appropriate skills to engage with more diverse communities than they do now, and to develop innovative ways of promoting heritage collections to customers.

Several interviewees who came to Libraries via alternative career paths described how the skills they transferred from previous roles have assisted them in their current roles where concerned with networking, information technology, and community development. Most interviewees felt supported by their managers to use the full range of their skills and be innovative in their roles, but several specified this ability came with caveats – either their workloads restricted their ability to innovate, or resources needed to fully bring an idea to fruition were difficult to secure. The complex landscape of institutional procurement processes, particularly where related to knowledge sharing around information technology, were said by some to be roadblocks to innovation or development. Similarly,

interviewees described library projects where collaboration with other business units of Council were complicated by a lack of understanding about the nature of the work of Libraries, and where assumptions about the level of expertise of Library staff impacted on progress.

## **7.6 Funding**

The impact of limited institutional budget was identified by all interviewees as a significant factor affecting their roles. Some indicated that budget was a factor in how collections were prioritised for processing, particularly if a collection had been donated along with a financial contribution, or if supervision was required for a project that had received funding. Others prioritised collection work based on time, as smaller collections were stated to take less time to process, thus could be completed in a relatively short timeframe.

Attention to fiscal responsibility was cited by all interviewees as a factor that affected their work, and how being a publicly-funded institution impacted on their ability to secure funding for projects, both internally and externally. Not having the resources to carry out the vision for projects was frequently a point of frustration for most, which in turn required staff to create workarounds to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

Competition for resources was a significant issue for staff when considering collaborative projects with community archives. Many acknowledged the increasing demand on funding agencies for heritage projects, and three interviewees referenced the often time-consuming and prohibitive nature of the process involved to secure those funds. Three interviewees have acted as facilitators between community archives and external organisations to secure funding for projects, and all stated that the time-consuming nature of securing grants is prohibitive and impacts on resources.

## 7.7 Collaboration

Views differed on whether Auckland Libraries as an institution has a mandate to collaborate with external organisations. Some interviewees stated that the institutional support required to undertake collaboration did not exist, though if it did, it was not explicitly supported by existing policy. Examples of collaborative activity provided by interviewees do however provide anecdotal evidence that collaboration occurs to varying degrees both within the constraints of existing institutional policy and process, and external to it. While this work was stated by interviewees as being often undertaken outside of the parameters of institutional frameworks, many stated that it often occurred with the visibility and support of their managers. Some stated that they are largely ‘left to do what they do’ without interference, which one interviewee determined was due their having a successful track record of completing innovative projects that were deemed ‘outside of the box’, but also considered to be low-risk to the institution. Another stated the need to get management onside first by ‘selling’ the project to them, to avoid the struggle caused by not having institutional support.

Collaborative activity undertaken by interviewees was found to generally include - but was not limited to - training in the management of physical archives, including advice on storage, care and handling; digitisation and digital preservation, including advice on hardware and software for scanning and backing up files, training on how to operate oral history recording devices, loaning of recording equipment, and digitisation of existing physical collections.

Collaboration is predominately undertaken with local historical societies and private museums, local boards, other heritage institutions, and a range of community organisations. Several interviewees mentioned more recent relationships that have been established with groups that represent migrant and minority communities in Auckland, which has provided opportunities to collaborate in innovative ways that have delivered mutually beneficial results.

Most collaborative activity was found to occur for similar reasons. Several interviewees stated their main reason for entering a collaborative arrangement with an external group was to respond to a perceived need or respond to a request for assistance. The location of the research centres and SGGSC was another factor highlighted by some as having an impact on collaborative activity, which they state was due in part to the demographic or the changing nature of the permanent residential population of certain areas. Auckland Central Library was identified by most as being most adversely affected by its location in an urban area, as opposed to the experience of the sub-regional research centres, which were found to have benefited from their suburban locations and the more permanent status of the residential population.

Two other barriers to collaboration emphasised in the interviews were the lack of awareness or skills in how to engage with diverse and minority communities, and the impact of the perceptions of library staff of the value of community archives on how they can contribute to organisational goals. Some mentioned that a lack of understanding of community archives resulted in an uneven response at the institutional level, but pointed out that the personal relationships created between an individual member of staff and a community archive are successful because of that relationship, but ceases once the connection between the community archive and the individual, rather than the institution, is broken.

## **8. Discussion**

### **8.1 Collection Policy**

Evidence identifies collection policy as a major influence on Auckland Libraries capacity to support community archives. The framework established by Auckland Council and Auckland Libraries' policy provides evidence of how institutional policy can provide a structure that promotes support for community archives. It



also provides evidence of how gaps in the policy structure and its content can affect the viability of this framework. Policy to govern the development and management of Auckland Libraries heritage collections at the regional level is yet to be advanced, and its absence is shown to create a gap between the high-level strategic policy and its application at the ground level. The evidence reveals three elements that are required to fill this gap in the policy framework and effectively enable the Heritage Unit to meet strategic outcomes and provide greater capacity to support community archives; collection scope, defining community archives, and collaboration.

### **8.1.1 Collection scope**

In their investigations of engagement between the formal heritage sector and communities, Flinn (2007) and Schull (2015) explain the trend for public library collections to reflect the lives and experiences of the more established members of society, rather than representing the lives and experiences of the non-elites, the grassroots and the marginalised. Evidence of this trend is revealed in the case of Auckland Libraries, where the current scope of the heritage collections does not reflect the diversity of the communities they represent. In this case, evidence shows the gap in collections has been exacerbated by the policy framework, which has been slow to evolve to meet the rapid change in the size and diversity of Auckland's population.

One way to address the disparity in collections is to embed what Stevens, et al, (2009) calls a culture of respect for diversity, or what Shull (2015) states is a professional recognition of the need to reimagine the structures for local and community history in the public library setting. The directions provided in Te Kauroa (2013) are evidence of a shift towards this more inclusive focus, where the aim to broaden the collections and reflect the diversity of Auckland's identity is clearly defined:

The changing face of Auckland needs to be reflected in our documentary heritage and this means we are broadening the scope of what we collect to ensure that the story of all Aucklanders is kept for future generations... Local stories are important and we will work with local communities and cultural groups to create, collect and keep the stories important to them (Auckland Libraries, 2013, p.34).

The evidence shows that how this outcome is to be achieved is less defined. Flinn (2007) suggests content provided by community archives is one way to address the imbalance. For this to work as a solution for Auckland Libraries, the existing policy framework needs to provide clear pathways that link engagement with community archives to strategic outcomes. This is a view that is also shared by staff:

I think Auckland Libraries should have a relationship with all of these community archives, and we should be assisting them, because to me they are the people on the ground. Our relationships tend to be with other institutions, rather than with individuals. But these are people who have had stuff passed down through their families, or even they themselves have collected it all...we don't have representation at that level, as an institution. So to me there's a continuity we're missing out on by not having a relationship with [them].

With the process for how this outcome is to be achieved yet to be formalised in regional policy, the discussion provided in the literature on defining what community archives are indicates a possible point for Auckland Libraries to begin.

### **8.1.2 Defining community archives**

To enable community archives to contribute to institutional outcomes, an agreement on a definition of what they are and the function they serve needs to be reached. The discussion around the definition of community archives in the national and international literature suggests that people's views of communities, or what community archives are or might be, are not necessarily clear or fixed. As

Newman (2010) states, the relatively new term ‘community archives’ tends to be loosely applied, and the definition of which is a cause for some debate. As Flinn (2007) suggests, the move to designate initiatives as community archives may give the impression of something distinctly new, and that perhaps obscures the fact that many local archivists have been working closely with similar groups, particularly local history societies, for years.

Evidence suggests this is the case for Auckland Libraries, where much engagement with community groups occurs within the confines of well-worn, familiar paths that have, until recently, met institutional requirements. Flinn’s view has wider implications when compared with recent international research, where according to Shull (2015), librarians and archivists are developing new archival collections in the context of extreme change in how people document their lives and the lives of others. This change poses new questions and implies new roles for both institutions and community archives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that includes greater attention to interpretation and programming to fulfil the potential of those collections.

While a definition of community archives has never been formally adopted in Auckland Libraries policy, a version does appear in several draft documents between 2011-2012. The draft Auckland Libraries’ Scoping Paper for Community Archives Outreach (2012) states that the term ‘community archives’ is complex and loaded with a variety of meanings. Evidence suggests part of the challenge to define them lies with staff and their very different views of what constitutes community archives, and what they believe their function is. Often their views are shown to have developed organically through individual experience, which in most cases reflect the zeitgeist when wrestling with the concept of community archives:

I think [the term community archives] gets used a lot of different ways very, very loosely, and you’ve really got to judge...what people are meaning by it, by the way in which they use[it], and often they don’t use it very definitely or accurately.

In the case of Auckland Libraries, any definition applied in policy needs to acknowledge both themes as defined by Newman (2010), with emphasis on the participatory element, to fully realise the potential contribution community archives can make towards the outcomes specified in Te Kauroa. This will ensure that many of the existing barriers to change are removed, and will clearly enable Libraries to also give narrative and meaning to the collections (Shull, 2015).

### **8.1.3 Collaboration**

As Newman (2010) suggests, collaboration is known to increase the chance of sustainability for community archives. Evidence from the case supports this theory, where collaboration is shown to be an effective solution to several of the issues faced by community archives. The issue of ownership, however, is revealed in the literature to limit the effectiveness of this response and act as a significant barrier to the creation of diverse collections by institutions, and more significantly, how those collections are used. Concerns about ownership is one factor that Welland (2015) identifies as contributing to the elevated level of wariness held by community archives concerning collaboration initiatives. A possible solution to this problem is proposed by Flinn, who maintains that the responsibility of the institution is to ensure it does not constrain the ability for archives to ‘speak for themselves, with their own voices’, and stresses the role of collection management policy in avoiding this outcome (Flinn, 2007, p.152). Therefore, policy that enables communities to retain ownership of their collections and engage in collaborative initiatives enables the sharing of libraries expertise, information and resources that result in the creation of new collections and content. Significantly, to enable and engage communities in this way also promotes and encourages collaboration that moves into the coordination level on the collaborative continuum, where the risks are higher, but so too are the rewards to the institution and the community archive.

Evidence suggests that the current state of Auckland Libraries policy does not currently deliver pathways for this level of collaboration. When compared to the collaborative continuum, the accounts of collaborative activity from the case are identify predominately with the contact and cooperation levels of the continuum, which are characterised as low-risk, but also low-reward (Zorich, et al, 2008). This result infers that there is a causative effect between the current state of the policy framework and the low-risk level of collaborative activity at Auckland Libraries.

Consequently, evidence suggests staff are limited in their ability to engage in the level of activity that is required to effectively achieve strategic outcomes. The policy thus reinforces what is described in the findings as a ‘culture of constraint’, which maintains a prescriptive environment of negligible risk. To move beyond these constraints, institutional policy must evolve to support meaningful change by enabling the level of collaborative activity that delivers greater rewards:

The intellectual and creative nature of collaboration - and the change required by participating parties - is much harder to develop and sustain... As units reorganise workflows and policies around the shared capacity, they discover new ways in which to leverage their combined assets, and over time realise the transformational quality which is the hallmark of deep collaboration (Zorich, et al, 2008, p.12).

In short, the high-constraint policy correlates to low-risk collaboration, and a subsequent low return to the institution. To fully achieve the outcome stated in Te Kauroa, the Heritage Unit needs to enable collaborative activity that is located at the far end of the collaboration continuum, where a low-constraint policy framework enables higher-risk collaborative activity, with greater benefits for the institution.

## 8.2 Preservation

### 8.2.1 Digital Preservation

Research by Newman (2010) identifies digital archives maintenance as one major form of support that institutions can provide to community archives. Enabling community archives to implement at least a minimum level of digital preservation is one way institutions can effectively respond to the challenge posed by the lack of straightforward information available to community archivists on how to manage electronic records in smaller collections (Welland, 2015). It also provides a response to Lavoie, et al, (as cited in Newman, 2010, p.39), who states that the issue of managing digital archives is one where collaboration may be particularly required in future due to the costs and technical challenges of maintaining sustainable digital archives.

Evidence provided by the Auckland Libraries case identifies how collaboration around digital preservation is compromised by the limitations of its own digital infrastructure. While preservation is relatively well managed for physical collections, the process for preservation of digital collections is still in its inception. This constraint is acknowledged in Te Kauroa, which states ‘there is a pressing need for an overall strategy for the preservation of born-digital and digitised material’ (Auckland Libraries, p.37). Copeland (2015) suggests that a sustainable infrastructure for digital preservation in libraries and other memory institutions needs to be based on collaboration, the creation of interoperable systems, and development of standards for creation, preservation, and reuse. In the case of the Heritage Unit, current workflows around digital preservation do not fully address all these factors, which creates barriers to the management of born digital content and compromises the institutional response to community archives. In the case of the Heritage Unit, progress is also limited by what evidence suggests is reluctance on the part of other large heritage institutions to share knowledge around digital initiatives, which is shown in part to be due to

confidential internal procurement processes for the development of digital infrastructure within those respective institutions.

In the case of Auckland Libraries, evidence shows that despite the limitations around digital strategy and workflow, Heritage Unit staff in the city and in the sub-regional research centres do actively engage with community archives to respond to their preservation challenges. Collaboration generally is shown to involve the provision of training, which is often carried out on an ad-hoc basis. Training is shown to generally offer guidance around standards for file creation and management, the use of equipment such as scanners and digital cameras, and advice on storage devices. This activity, while informal, is shown to enable community archives to improve their standards around the creation of digital records and digital preservation, and facilitate the purchase of equipment such as scanners and external hard drives. In the absence of resources to purchase and operate equipment, basic digital preservation standards for community archives are also shown to be achieved through collaborative efforts, where some physical collections are digitised in-house, access and preservation copies created, and copies of the digital derivatives supplied to the community. In some cases, the original material is donated to the library for preservation purposes. The type of content covered has included oral histories, photographs (including physical albums, digitised content and born digital), born-digital content such as minutes of meetings, newsletters and ephemera. Significantly, this work is shown to enable a level of control over the quality of digital content received via donation, in the absence of formal standards.

Based on Newman's model (2010), this activity provides support across three areas of sustainability for community archives; collaboration, where cooperative activity achieves goals around preservation and expertise; preservation, where basic conservation needs are met and appropriate equipment and supplies are acquired; and dynamism, where new practices and technologies are adopted. This activity is for the most part conducted at the cooperation and coordination level of

the continuum, which provides a moderate level of support towards sustainability for the community archive. The benefits to the Heritage Unit at this level are also conservative, and require minimal use of resources. Activity that sits at the higher coordination level could provide greater benefit to the Heritage Unit by involving the establishment of a systematic programme of formal (as opposed to passive) donation of born digital content from community archives that are subject to a predetermined set of preservation standards, or a formal programme of training (as opposed to ad-hoc) that establishes protocols for community archives to manage digital preservation on-site.

### **8.2.2 Storage**

Storage for physical collections is another factor that research suggests affects community archives and institutions in equal measure. Welland (2015) suggests that in general, community archives in New Zealand want to meet basic guidelines for storage, but are restricted by limited resources or the inadequate knowledge of archives staff. As a workable solution to their storage needs, Newman (2010) suggests community archives can join with other cultural institutions to collaborate via shared facilities and services, negotiate to occupy space which already meets requirements within established facilities, or transfer collections to another appropriate repository.

The Auckland Libraries case shows that implementation of some of these solutions may be problematic. In 2012, storage at Auckland Libraries was noted as being inadequate, both in terms of preservation standards and capacity, and therefore not able to fully accommodate current or future collections (Auckland Libraries, 2012). Evidence shows that present demand for environmentally-controlled storage has exceeded capacity, which is a situation not likely to improve in the short to mid-term due to budget constraints.

While collaboration with institutions provides a way to readdress these issues, evidence reveals that any effort on the part of public libraries need to focus on



improving community archives' ability to manage collections in-situ. This is to prevent competition for institutional storage space, as the limited capacity is shown to impact the ability of staff to accept complete collections for donation. Evidence from this case reveals that often, instead of acquiring full collections, staff are appraising collections for the items that have the most significance, are that are a preservation risk, or provide an exemplar of the collection. Acquisition of partial collections thus limits the need for storage, but also impacts negatively on the sustainability, interpretation and use of those collections. However, Flinn argues that even when collections remain within the community, this level of collaborative activity between the community archive and the institution will still contribute to the preservation and sustainability of a more diverse and democratic heritage' (Flinn, 2007).

### **8.3 Engagement**

While the reasons for why community archives are reluctant to engage with institutions are well documented in the literature, the factors that affect engagement from the institutional perspective are less defined. As Shull suggests, despite a dedication to outreach, staff in heritage institutions often do not have the requisite support to operate on all fronts simultaneously (Shull, 2015, p.xxiii). Welland (2015) states that engagement with community archives is not prioritised within the wider heritage industry, which means guidance and support is not forthcoming. Evidence from the Auckland Libraries case indicates that even if the institutional mandate is weak or lacking, staff often are motivated to engage with community archives, but are limited by several factors (outside of the discussion on policy in 8.1) at the institutional level.

The first factor is the method of engagement. Evidence shows the predominant pattern of engagement is via the creation of one-off interpersonal relationships between an individual Heritage Unit staff member and a community archive. While the framework of institutional policy at Auckland Libraries is shown to

provide support for engagement, in the case of some staff, this engagement occurs more often on an ad-hoc basis, due to individual motivations or a perceived need, and often the expense of, or in addition to, their core roles and responsibilities.

How these relationships are maintained over time is shown to be problematic, as while informal connections function in the short term, evidence suggests the staff member leaving the institution has a significant effect on the sustainability of these relationships. Once the informal connection is lost; the relationship with the community archive is often lost also. This reflects what Flinn (2011) states is the need for relationships to be sustained by fostering mutual trust and respect, rather than by one-off exercises between individuals who will eventually move on.

The second factor is the lack of awareness amongst staff of how to engage with community archives. Despite their professional knowledge and affinity with the work, the case shows that staff are often uncertain about how to approach communities, and feel disenfranchised by a lack of awareness about cultural and organisational protocols. One significant advantage indicated in the research was shown to be the ability to identify with a diverse community. This was shown to help establish trust with a group, which is a factor that Schull (2015) states in her research is a major contributor to successful engagement between public libraries and community archives in the United States, where in many cases liaison librarians are employed to provide a link between the community and the institution. In the case of the Austin History Centre in the Austin Public Library in Texas, outreach archivists are employed to work with members of historically under-documented groups to carry out neighbourhood documentation projects and identify potential collections for the History Centre (Schull, p.40). At Auckland Libraries, engagement was shown to be successful where facilitated by staff who themselves identified with a diverse community, and or had strong links to one. In some cases evidence shows that even with this connection, successful engagement followed a sometimes lengthy process of building trust through attendance at multiple events and meetings with communities, and providing proof of how other minority or diverse communities had successfully engaged with the Heritage Unit in the past.

The third barrier to engagement identified by this case is location. Location is one factor that Newman (2010) cites as being the reason why community archives do not collaborate with institutions. The location of the Auckland Central Library was shown to be a barrier to the creation of active links with communities, in particular in the highly urbanised area in the city centre. Evidence suggests this is a direct result of the changes in the urban population of the central city, where the high proportion of transitory communities that live in the city are not as embedded in their place of residence as those who reside in sub-regional areas. Because of this, the Central Auckland Research Centre and SGGSC are shown to be more adversely affected by geography, more so than the sub-regional research centres. Evidence suggests that the higher proportion of long-term residents served by the sub-regional research centres have a more interconnected relationship with their communities, and hence have broader opportunities for engagement.

### **8.3.1 Training**

Evidence derived from the case shows that training is currently a significant aspect of the support provided by the Heritage Unit to community archives, however much of this engagement is subject to the influence of internal factors such as demands on staff hours and meeting the obligations of their roles. This experience echoes what Shull (2015) states is the difficulty faced by professionals working in heritage institutions to find the balance between carrying out traditional archival practices and doing more education and interpretation. One mitigating factor identified by Welland (2015) is the lack of traction in larger archival institutions to promote collaborative forms of training involving community archives. While evidence from this case does support this idea, Heritage Unit staff also show a degree of adaptation that enables them to work effectively within these constraints. This level of collaborative activity is generally stated in the literature as being effective at countering ad-hoc management processes employed by community archives to address shortcomings in archival practice. When compared to the collaborative continuum, most of this

activity occurs at the early contact and cooperation levels on the continuum. At these levels, the complexity and risk to the Heritage Unit and the community archives is low, and the benefits enable a moderate contribution to the sustainability of the community archive.

### **8.3.2 Interpretation and use of collections**

The other significant area where the Heritage Unit has engaged with community archives is around the interpretation and use of their collections. Evidence of collaboration provided by this case demonstrates how support can extend beyond the traditional delivery of training in archival practice to enable community archives to participate and control how that material is disseminated.

Opportunities to collaborate with more diverse communities are shown to be initiated by staff who have interpreted the space created by the policy to pursue projects that fulfil the requirements set out in Te Kauroa. Evidence shows that staff have been undertaking this work ‘under the radar’, often over an extended period, and have developed what some call a renegade approach to how they operate to get that work done. The case demonstrates how this engagement is reactive, rather than strategic, and has resulted in successful collaborative projects that have produced exhibitions and interactive events that utilise crowd-sourced material, oral history and video recordings produced with training and equipment from the Heritage Unit and wider Library, and a range of both traditional documentary heritage material and contemporary digitised and born-digital material. Many of these exhibitions are subsequently uploaded to the Library’s website, blog site, and YouTube channel and marketed via the library’s social media platforms, with several exhibitions re-used by external organisations for local and regional events.

This activity shifts the level of collaboration on the continuum up from *cooperation* to *collaboration*, where the risks are increased, but so are the rewards. Fresh content is sourced from diverse communities in a way that meets

their needs and contributes to their sustainability, while the Library receives unique collections and engages with the community in a way that effectively achieves the outcomes specified in Te Kauroa (Auckland Libraries, 2013). Formalising this level of activity in policy removes the ad-hoc, reactionary element of the work, and facilitates greater input from communities. This requires the Library to relinquish an element of control and ownership, which increases the risk, which is subsequently mitigated by the contribution to strategic outcomes. Significantly, this level of collaboration enables the type of dynamic shift in the relevance of heritage collections in public library institutions that contributes to their sustainability into the future.

#### **8.4 Access and Discovery**

The literature identifies access and discovery as another key area of concern for community archives, and one that Newman (2010) and Welland (2015) point out is a significant issue for many. As Welland (2015) notes, most community archives struggle to grasp the skills required to promote their collections online and provide access to their content. The literature shows that a considerable level of digital acumen is required to maintain oversight of the rapidly changing digital landscape in which digital collections now reside. The ability of community archives to share their stories and create exhibitions from digital content is revealed in the literature to often be reliant on collaborative relationships with institutions, where staff have skills and awareness of the appropriate channels to promote discovery, that otherwise might be out of reach.

Evidence from the case suggests there are several factors operating in the institutional context that limit their ability to provide support in this area. A primary focus for Te Kauroa (Auckland Libraries, 2013) is to extend access to digital content, though the case identifies several factors that over time have created barriers to access, which may go some way to explain why institutional responses can be limited. The most significant factor for Auckland Libraries has

been the absence of a robust digital strategy. This is shown to have maintained the pre-amalgamation structure that governed the allocation of resources for the management of digital collections across the region. While the scale of the task to redistribute resources across the region post-amalgamation required significant planning, evidence suggests the absence of strategic direction led to this process being protracted.

Evidence suggests internal relationships within an institution can unduly impact on access and discovery. Reliance on Auckland Council internal IT support was identified as a barrier to digital innovation, which impacted on the ability of staff to produce the effective digital workflows required to improve the state of digital services in the Heritage Unit. This was shown to be partly due to the failure of Auckland Council's IT staff to fully comprehend the business of libraries and appreciate the expertise of library staff where concerned with access to collections. This was also seen to impact negatively on discovery, where the range of databases used to access collections were another major obstacle, exacerbated by variable metadata standards and the ability of staff to effectively describe collections.

The amount of resource required to make content accessible was shown to be equally prohibitive to discovery. This was considered to have a direct impact on the ability of staff to make collections fully discoverable online, which resulted in a relatively limited proportion of collections being fully described and contributed to an inadequate and fragmented user experience. One solution to these barriers is to enable communities to collaborate on the arrangement and description of their collections, to address the limitations posed to access and discovery by traditional descriptive paradigms. Enabling collaboration at a higher level with communities in the development of descriptive metadata fields can also capture significant information about their collections and significantly improve discovery. Both also reduce the pressure on staff resources, which leads to mutually beneficial outcomes.

Collaboration with institutional staff to learn how to promote collections via alternative external digital platforms is shown in the literature to be beneficial, by upskilling community archives to utilise a range of digital channels. However, the ability of institutions to utilise these platforms to promote access to collections within the national context is shown to have disadvantages both to the institution and to the community:

Getting stuff online, making stuff available, sharing the stories, is really hard because the landscape shifts so much. It's actually really expensive and demanding in terms of technical resources for the community libraries to get stuff out there. What exists right now in New Zealand is really...weak.

Despite this, evidence shows staff are highly motivated to empower groups to engage more with digital platforms (as described in 8.3.2) to, where possible, utilise both internal and external resources to support community archives to increase their sustainability by increasing what Newman (2010) refers to as 'dynamism'. In this way, community archives can collaborate with Libraries to develop and retain skills in-house to secure access to and discovery of their collections into the future.

## **8.5 Funding**

Newman (2010) states that regular and dependable funding is one effective form of support that institutions can provide community archives (p 158). However, evidence provided by the case suggests that fiscal responsibility, particularly for publicly-funded institutions, can prohibit financial support for community archives. As a publicly funded institution, Auckland Libraries is constrained by the need to be accountable to ratepayers, though evidence suggests that while the Heritage Unit is generally not in the position to provide direct financial support, alternatives are shown to have effectively contributed to the financial

sustainability of community archives through the sharing of resources for training, preservation, and the marketing of collections.

Given the typical sources of funding available to community archives, it is unlikely that they can achieve more reliable or significant funding than they already do (Auckland Libraries, 2012), however evidence shows that having transparent, measurable outcomes within library policy that links support for community archives in a structured or formalised way to institutional outcomes is a vital factor which justifies the expenditure of ratepayer funds and contributes to their financial sustainability,

Evidence shows that advocacy to secure funding for community archives is an effective conduit to financial sustainability, with Heritage Unit staff shown to provide oversight of the funding frameworks available to community archives, and to assist with the application process. However, even this level of support is shown to impact negatively on resources, as the process of securing grants is time consuming and in some cases, is revealed to be prohibitive. In cases where the funding is connected to a specific project or collection, the ongoing workload to pull together the project and supervise volunteers to achieve agreed outcomes can be extensive.

## **9. Future state**

While this case-study research considers the current state of the Heritage Unit of Auckland Libraries, a brief discussion of the future state of this institution is useful as a measure of the impact of significant and meaningful organisational change.

The high-level move to implement the strategic direction outlined in Te Kauroa, contemporaneous to a Council-wide cost-saving initiative, has been the catalyst for recent and significant institutional change across 2016 and 2017. As part of those changes, the composition and function of the Heritage Unit has been realigned in the aim of establishing a more dynamic and flexible service that is ready to meet the challenges faced by a changing customer base and expanding digital landscape. These initiatives



include the creation of more dynamic and responsive roles, and the procurement of a new digital platform to address gaps in the collections and improve access to and discovery of them. While as of June 2017 these changes are still in progress and some way off from producing measurable results, the implication is that the institution is heading in the right direction to achieve a more sustainable and inclusive future both for the institution, the communities, and community archives it serves.

## **10. Conclusion**

The ability of public library institutions to successfully navigate internal challenges is shown to impact on their ability to respond to the needs of community archives, and contribute effectively to their sustainability. In the case of Auckland Libraries, gaps in the internal framework of institutional policy that governs strategic direction within the Heritage Unit was revealed to be a major constraint on the efficacy of this response, which contributed to a lack of diversity in the collections and had a direct impact on the institution's ability to meet strategic outcomes. Engagement with Community archives was revealed as a solution to addressing the imbalance, which required the policy framework to provide greater capacity for diversity, incorporate an inclusive definition of community archives, and provide greater scope for innovative collaboration.

The case identified engagement as the area where institutional support was most likely to contribute to the sustainability of community archives, where efforts by staff to provide training in the management of collections and the interpretation and use of those collections was shown to be effective and produce mutually beneficial outcomes for both. Areas where this support was less forthcoming were shown to be funding, preservation, and access and discovery. These results were shown to be caused by institutional constraints that included a lack of digital strategy, a lack of storage capacity for physical collections, and limitations posed by fiscal responsibility in the expenditure of resources and budget owing to the library being a publicly-funded entity.

Despite these institutional limitations, the Heritage Unit of Auckland Libraries is shown to have effectively established functional, though largely conservative, collaborative relationships with community archives. However, these relationships remain

predominately informal and ill-equipped in their present state to fully respond to the demands of an increasingly diverse demographic. This is shown to impact negatively on the ability of staff to achieve a higher level of collaboration that enables the collection and use of community archives in a way that supports their sustainability and meets strategic institutional outcomes.

## **11. Suggestions for further research**

Other related studies could follow on from this research. These include:

- A study of the impact of workplace or occupational culture on institutional engagement with community archives.
- The impact of internal procurement processes on institutional collaboration.
- A study of how the principles of community engagement applied in non-heritage sectors can be applied to engagement with community archives.

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## Appendix I      Copy of invitation to participate in interviews

Dear [Name]

I am undertaking a research project as part of completing my Master of Information Studies degree at Victoria University of Wellington.

My research examines the relationship between public libraries and community archives, and uses Auckland Libraries Heritage and Research Unit as a case-study to provide evidence to support this research.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview as part of this project. An information sheet is attached for your reference. Please read through it and reply if you are happy to be involved, or to decline if you are not. Approval to conduct interviews has been granted by Auckland Libraries management, and by the Human Ethics Committee at Victoria.

The attached consent form will be completed prior to the interview. Again, feel free to read through this and respond with any questions you may have.

I appreciate this is a time of change for our unit, and while the proposal for this project was completed prior to the release of information about Fit for the Future, I feel the research will capture valuable information that I hope can go on to be used to inform and expand on our knowledge of community archives, and also the role libraries play in our communities. I would greatly appreciate your participation.

Kind regards,

Erica O'Flaherty

## Appendix II Interview questions

### A. Questions about your understanding of community archives:

1. Within the context of your role as a heritage professional, can you tell me what you understand community archives to be?

Newman (2010) defines community archives as the following:

“Community archives are collections of archival records that originate in a community – that is, a group of people who live in the same location or share other forms of community of interest – and whose collection, maintenance and use involve the active participation of that community”.

2. Given this definition, can you explain what you consider the differences to be between what community archives do and the work the Heritage Unit of Auckland Libraries does?
3. What is your own personal opinion of community archives – can you describe how you feel about them based on your current understanding?
4. Can you explain how you think community archives are perceived within the professional heritage industry?

### B. Your role:

5. Can you tell me about the factors affecting how you do your work? Are these issues changing over time or relatively constant?
6. Can you explain how you see your role in the future, how it could change?
7. Can you explain if you feel supported by peers and management to be innovative in your role, in terms of adapting processes or implementing new ways of working?
8. How do you stay informed about the industry in terms of awareness of new theoretical or practical developments or shifts in professional practice?
9. Can you explain if your role currently involves collaboration with other archives or heritage institutions, and what form this takes?
10. Can you explain how you prioritise collections for processing? What factors inform this process, i.e. demand, perceived value, preservation?
11. Some of the problems facing community archives are a lack of access to knowledge, training and resources. Can you tell me how you think your role could work with community archives to find solutions to some of these issues?
12. How would you currently manage a request from a community archive for assistance, for example if you were asked for help with digitising or storage of collections?

13. How would you feel about engaging on a structured level with community archives; for example, providing training workshops, engaging in one-on-one training or assisting with policy development?

**C. The role of the institution:**

14. Heritage institutions are noted in recent research as being a potential source of support for community archives. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Can you explain why or why not?
15. What do you think are some of the potential barriers to public libraries engaging with community archives?
16. Do you think any collaborative arrangement with community archives should enable them to retain autonomy over their collections? Can you explain why/why not?
17. What do you think Auckland Libraries could gain from engaging more with organisations that identify as community archives?
18. Can you discuss your thoughts on the diversity of Auckland Libraries heritage collections? Do you think they reflect the communities we represent?
19. Providing access to collections is a significant issue for community archives. One outcome stated in Auckland Libraries strategic document *Te Kauroa* is to 'share and celebrate Auckland's unique stories'. How do you think Auckland Libraries could collaborate with community archives to deliver good outcomes for both?
20. The creation and management of born digital content is also identified as a major concern impacting on the sustainability of community archives in New Zealand. What role do you think Auckland Libraries could play in helping community archives to be sustainable digitally?

**D. Other comments**

21. Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

