



Canadian Association of Research Libraries

Historical Overview: 1976 - 2025

Our association was initially created in 1972 as the Canadian Academic Research Libraries section of the Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL), itself a division of the Canadian Library Association (CLA).

Creation and Membership

The 29 CARL founding member libraries met in Ottawa on October 21, 1975, and voted to create “a Canadian association of academic research libraries independent of CACUL and funded directly by member institutions.” CARL was officially launched at the 1976 inaugural membership meeting in Regina.

Since 1976, two new university libraries joined CARL, Brock (2009) and Ryerson (2010 – now Toronto Metropolitan University). The Library of Parliament was a member between 1999 and 2012, and rejoined as member in 2025.

Governance

CARL became a federally incorporated non-profit corporation in 1981 and a registered charity in 1984. The association made the necessary changes to respect the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (S.C. 2009, C. 23) in 2013, reaffirming its original charitable purposes and adopting new By-Laws.

CARL had no staff until 1981, after which it hired Margaret Allen as Executive Secretary (1981-1984), Bonnie Jehu as Executive Director (1984-1986), and subsequent Executive Directors (now full-time), David McCallum (1986-1995), Timothy Mark (1995-2008), Brent Roe (2008-2014), and Susan Haigh (2014-present).

The CARL team grew over these years, reaching up to five employees. Originally accommodated in the University of Ottawa’s Morisset Library, the CARL office moved to shared spaces with the Association of University and Colleges of Canada (now Universities Canada), and then into its own space in downtown Ottawa in 2013. In 2023, CARL moved its headquarters to the MacOdrum Library in Carleton University.

The association’s annual budget of nearly \$1M comes mostly from membership dues. Member libraries can also make special contributions to special projects.

Our actions are guided by CARL’s Strategic Focus 2022-2025. The first strategic plan covered 2006-2009 (including a 2008 update), followed by the 2010-2012, 2013-2016, 2016-2019, and 2019-2022 strategic plans.

Successful projects

Two organizations were initially created as major CARL projects. The Canadian National Site Licensing Project, launched in 1996, was incorporated as the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN) in 2001. AlouetteCanada, a project aimed at promoting and providing access to digitized Canadian heritage at institutions across Canada, merged with the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproduction (CIHM)--itself a creation of CARL member libraries--to form Canadiana.org in 2008.

The Portage Network was launched by CARL in 2015. CARL Portage was led by a Director (Jeff Moon, a secondment from Queen's University) and worked within the library community to coordinate expertise, services, and technology in research data management (RDM), seeking to collaborate with other research data management stakeholders. On April 1, 2021, Portage became fully incorporated as the RDM team in the operations of the New Digital Research Infrastructure Organization (now The Alliance), a major success story for CARL and its members.

In 2018 CARL and Library and Archives Canada's (LAC) created a joint working group "Canadian Collective Print Preservation Strategy Working Group" to design and implement a national strategy of collective print preservation and access in Canada. From this work, in 2022 "North: The Canadian Shared Print Network" was created; a national shared print network that coordinates the activities of existing regional shared print initiatives and provides a path to participation for other interested libraries not yet in a shared print program.

Activities

The late Alan MacDonald, retired CARL director, noted that the most frequent discussion topics between 1976 and 2005 included, in decreasing order: copyright, the National Library of Canada (later Library and Archives Canada), library statistics, government publications, interlibrary loan and document delivery, library collections assessment and rationalization. It also included computing networks, scholarly communication, Canadian statistics, research funding councils, preservation and conservation of library materials, CISTI, licensing consortia, microfilming and digitization, and the (US-based) Association of Research Libraries.

Many of these topics remain on CARL's agenda, along with new issues such as open access, institutional repositories, research data management, librarian research, librarian leadership development, accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion, artificial intelligence, privacy, digital literacy, open education, and Indigenous knowledge.

CARL Presidents: 1976-2025

President	Institution	Years in office
Hans Moeller	University of Ottawa	1976-1977
Marianne Scott	McGill University	1977-1978
Geoffrey Briggs	Carleton University	1978-1979
Gertrude Gunn	University of New Brunswick	1979-1981
Anne Woodsworth	York University	1981-1983
Guy Cloutier	Université de Sherbrooke	1983-1985
Graham Hill	McMaster University	1985-1987
Doug McInnes	University of British Columbia	1987-1989
Carole Moore	University of Toronto	1989-1991
Ted Dobb	Simon Fraser University	1991-1993
Jean-Pierre Côté	Université du Québec à Montréal	1993-1995
Carolyn Presser	University of Manitoba	1995-1997
Marnie Swanson	University of Victoria	1997-1999
Frances Groen	McGill University	1999-2001
Bill Maes	Dalhousie University	2001-2003
Joyce Garnett	University of Western Ontario	2003-2005
John Teskey	University of New Brunswick	2005-2007
Leslie Weir	University of Ottawa	2007-2009
Ernie Ingles	University of Alberta	2009-2011
Thomas Hickerson	University of Calgary	2011-2013
Gerald Beasley	University of Alberta	2013-2015
Martha Whitehead	Queen's University	2015-2017
Donna Bourne-Tyson	Dalhousie University	2017-2019
Jonathan Bengtson	University of Victoria	2019-2021
Vivian Lewis	McMaster University	2021-2023
Brett Waytuck	University of Regina	2023-present