

Secure a future for the past

In search of a new home for the Connexions Archive

“Anyone who has explored the world of archives will know that it is a treasure house, one that is full of surprises, crossing paths, dead ends, painful reminders and unanswered questions.”

- Nelson Mandela

“Don’t it always seem to go, that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone.”

- Joni Mitchell

“Within the broader realm of archives, Connexions fills a unique, indispensable and ultimately dynamic role – documenting Canadian grassroots movements for social and environmental justice. Because these movements tend to be ignored or misrepresented in the mainstream present, they can fade too easily and irretrievably into oblivion. Connexions ensures that their legacy – a vital part of our shared legacy – remains alive and accessible.”

- Michael Riordon

www.connexions.org

Executive Summary

The future is rooted in the past. Learning from and building on the past helps us understand the present and to create a better future. The Connexions Archive is a unique resource for the grassroots in Toronto, in Ontario and in Canada. For the last 35 years, Connexions has worked to preserve the records and achievements of grassroots projects and movements and to make them available in living, breathing form using modern tools to make it instantly accessible, and searchable to everyone.

The Connexions Archive is searching for a new space to house its extensive collection and those who work on it.

We need a partner organization or consortium to provide space or material resources to make it possible. We are seeking help from individuals who are able to make the 'connections' to help secure space or funding.

The Connexions Archive is a project established in 1975 to keep alive and share the rich history of grassroots movements for social justice. It is both a physical archive housing materials that span more than 50 years of grassroots activism, and an electronic archive engaged in digitizing the materials in its collection and making them widely available online.

The Connexions Archive is at a watershed moment in its own history. Its activities are thriving and growing, but it may soon find itself without a roof over its head.

For the past 15 years, Connexions has been housed in space donated by a supportive organization. That space will be closing this year, making it necessary to find a new home for the collection and for the volunteers and interns who work to digitize, abstract, index, and translate the materials in the collection.

The Connexions Archive operates with no outside sources of income – a miracle of making things happen on very little except the vision and enthusiasm of volunteers! – so its future also depends on finding either donated space, or help from partners, sponsors, funders and donors willing to support the long-term survival of the project.

Because Connexions is a working archive – a place where interns and volunteers come to scan, index, write, research, and translate – it needs a transit-accessible space able to accommodate both the physical collection and those who work on it.

Its space needs are modest. It currently occupies about 1,500 feet of space, though a larger space would allow the Connexions Archive to accept more materials and would provide space for more volunteers, interns and equipment.

Connexions is approaching potential supporters and partners – individuals and institutions – to provide space directly, or to provide suggestions, contacts, introductions, letters of support, or other assistance in establishing a new home for the Connexions Archive. Our goal is to secure a future for the Connexions Archive by enlisting the creative support of partners and sponsors who see the value of this project.

Connexions: A Living Archive

What is the Connexions Archive?

- A physical archive comprising tens of thousands of documents, newsletters, magazines, newspapers, posters, brochures, leaflets, books, newspaper clippings, buttons, postcards, audio recordings and other materials.
- An ever-expanding digital archive with more than 10,000 documents and images already available online, and more being added continuously.

What does the Connexions Archive do?

- The Connexions Archive is an extremely active “living archive” where interns and volunteers from Canada, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia come together to work on digitizing, abstracting, indexing, and translating materials and making them available online.
- Connexions’ internship program provides interesting and challenging work experience for Canadian and international interns. Over the past five years, interns and volunteers have come to Connexions from more than 25 countries, as well as from various parts of Canada.
- The Connexions website makes materials available to a wide national and international public. The multi-level indexing system gives users – activists, students, scholars, and the general public – deeper and more relevant search results when they search for information, ideas, and sources. The website records more than 250,000 page views a month, and usage is steadily growing.
- The Connexions Archive provides graduate students and researchers with access to the materials in the physical collection.

Why is the Connexions Archive important?

- Dedicated to keeping alive the rich history of grassroots movements in Toronto, in Ontario and in Canada
- A resource to help the citizen activists of today and tomorrow connect with and learn from the lives, the work, the writings, and the experiences of prior generations of citizen activists.
- The Connexions Archive collects resources reflecting a diversity of viewpoints and alternative approaches to achieving social justice and environmental sustainability. The bulk of collection comes from grassroots groups and projects in English Canada.
- Our mandate supports the values of democracy, civil liberties, freedom of speech, universal human rights, secularism, equality, economic justice, ecology, and the creation and preservation of community.

Statement of Values

We believe

In the value of preserving the history of grassroots movements for social justice and making it accessible to new generations.

In the importance of keeping alive the memories, experiences, strategies, successes, failures, and visions of those who have worked for social justice over the years so future generations can learn from them and be inspired by them.

In the tradition of ‘history from below’, working to keep alive memories of resistance in the face of a political culture that insists there are no alternatives to the way things are, and that ‘resistance is futile’.

In the importance of diversity and pluralism, of recording and making available a wide range of approaches to social change and social justice. We aim, as best we can, to feature resources reflecting a variety of viewpoints and alternative approaches to social justice.

In the value of knowing our history, of knowing that people have been working at the grassroots for a better world for many decades and of learning about the problems they faced and how they tried to deal with them.

In the value of passing on the experience and knowledge of elders, and of people who have passed on, to the activists of today and tomorrow. These are threads of wisdom and experience that can be woven into the tapestries of our movements for change.

In the importance of sharing information as well as preserving it. Our goal is to make the contents of the archive available as widely as possible, in a variety of formats and languages.

In connecting people in different places. For people to act locally and think globally, it helps to know what people in other places are facing and how they are trying to bring about change.

In the values of democracy, civil liberties, freedom of speech, universal human rights, secularism, equality, economic justice, ecology, and the creation and preservation of community, which we seek to support through the Connexions Archive.

A brief history of Connexions

The Connexions project arose in 1975 from a loose network of Canadian community organizers and advocates involved with issues related to poverty and homelessness in Canada. Feeling a need to exchange information, ideas, and reflections on their experiences, they formed a collectively based information clearinghouse for grassroots activists.

The new project was named “Canadian Information Sharing Service.” Participants sent copies of their materials to be abstracted and shared. A stapled newsletter with information and abstracts about resources and projects was issued several times a year to participants and other interested parties.

In 1978, the name of the project was changed to “Connexions” to more clearly identify the project’s goal of connecting grassroots activists with each other and with information, ideas, and organizations.

Funding for the project was minimal. Free space was provided by churches in Toronto, and ‘printing’ was done on a Gestetner machine, (a small manual printing press then found in many church and non-profit offices). The work was done by a collective of committed volunteers assisted by local contacts across the country.

This model – a volunteer collective relying largely on donated resources – has defined the project for most of its 35-year existence. Despite its modest scale, it has been remarkably productive, publishing abstracts and descriptions of thousands of resources and organizations, and playing a low-key but significant networking role among grassroots activists for more than three decades.

The Connexions Archive grew organically from documents that were sent to the Connexions office from across Canada. Over time, a substantial collection of materials developed and the Connexions Archive gradually began to assume a distinct organizational identity of its own.

In 1985, Connexions began publishing the *Connexions Directory of Grassroots Organizations*. The Directory is now available in electronic form on the Connexions website, along with the *Connexions Calendar*, which lists events sponsored by grassroots organizations. Profiles and literature from hundreds of projects and organizations which are no longer in existence but which were included in earlier editions of the Connexions Directory, are now preserved in the Connexions Archive.

In 1994, publisher and media critic Barrie Zwicker offered to provide space to house the Connexions Archive in the building housing the *SOURCES* directory. *SOURCES* also made server capacity available for the nascent online version of Connexions.

Development work began on the Connexions website – www.connexions.org – which replaced the printed *Connexions Digest* newsletter as the medium through which abstracts of materials are published and disseminated.

Currently work is focused on digitizing documents in the Connexions Archive and on developing indexing systems and search technologies for the content. The Connexions website has developed into a sophisticated and widely used site providing access to many thousands of documents. It is visited by users from more than 100 countries, and receives more than 250,000 page views a month.

A quick overview of the Connexions Archive

- The collection includes more than 10,000 periodicals, more than 2,000 books and pamphlets, 20 filing cabinets with documents and clippings, as well as posters, audiotapes, buttons, and other non-document materials.
- The collection is housed mainly in filing cabinets and on shelves; with some additional materials currently stored in boxes in a storage locker.
- The Connexions Archive also houses materials which belong to individuals who have placed them with the archive on long-term loan to be scanned and indexed and made available for research.
- The Connexions Archive currently occupies about 1500 square feet of space.
- The current space includes 12 work stations for interns, volunteers, and researchers, most with computers and and/or scanners, a small server room, an administrative office, and a small meeting space.

The Connexions Digital Archive

The Digital Archive is at the core of Connexions as it represents the key to accessibility and search. Once digitized, most materials in the Connexions Archive are made available online via the Connexions website www.connexions.org. Some digitized materials are available on-site only, and not on the website because of copyright or technical restrictions.

Connexions.org, the website, is a distinct and separate entity that works hand in hand with the Connexions Archive to make materials from the archive available online once digitized. Connexions.org also features and indexes content that does not originate in the Connexions archive, notably documents published by other organizations and documents in other archives, as well as a current events calendar (the Connexions Calendar), a directory of grassroots organizations (the Connexions Directory), and Connexipedia, a recently initiated social justice encyclopedia.

Connexions.org receives approximately 50,000 visitors per month, and registers about 250,000 page views monthly.

Documents in the Connexions Archive are often scanned in two formats during digitization. An OCR (text) scan makes it possible to create searchable text that search engines like Google can read and index. An image scan allows users to see a copy of the original publication as it actually appears visually. In materials where the visual design is an important feature (e.g. newsletters and leaflets) both types of scans are normally required.

A description or abstract is provided for each resource wherever possible, and subject headings selected from a *controlled-vocabulary database of terms* are assigned to every item. Wikipedia references Connexions as “one of the largest, if not the largest, human-indexed archives of social change documents in existence.”(1)

Connexions uses sophisticated multi-level indexing and search systems to assist users in finding the materials in the collection most pertinent to their needs. One of the ideas underpinning the Connexions approach is to guide users not only to the resources they are searching for, but also to types of resources that they may not have thought of but which may be relevant to the subject being researched. The use of an extensive controlled-vocabulary database of search terms allows for in-depth indexing and cross-indexing of resources.

The Connexions indexing and search system is designed to provide a deeper level of relevance than is provided by popular search engines such as Google. Whereas Google ranks results largely by popularity (and ability to pay for placement), Connexions puts more emphasis on the depth and quality of coverage found in a document. Search results include links to related *concepts and topics* which the user may not have considered.

At the same time, the Connexions website employs a variety of search engine optimization (SEO) techniques designed to ensure that documents in the Connexions Archive rank high in relevant searches in Google and other search engines. In many instances, users first discover the Connexions site through Google, and then discover the depth of resources on the site through the indexing and search functions specific to Connexions. Visitors to the site typically view an average of five pages per visit, which is an excellent measure of relevance and interest.

While we are proud of the amount of *information* available on the Connexions website and in the Connexions Archive, the true goal is to foster something more valuable: *knowledge* and *understanding* of how and why social transformation happens, and to be an inspiration for action.

(1) Wikipedia: Connexions Information Sharing Services
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connexions_%28website%29

The English, French, Spanish, and German versions of Wikipedia all have articles about Connexions, and in addition translations are now also available online in Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, and Swedish.

A sampling of publications and groups whose materials are included in the Connexions Archive

Alternate Society
Alternative to Alienation
The Badger
BiMonthly Reports
The Black Fly
Bread & Roses Newsletter
Briarpatch
Bulldozer
CalendHer
Canadian Dimension
Canadian News Synthesis Project
Canadian World Federalist
Committee for a Sustainable Economy
Community Forum on Shared Responsibility
Compleat Mother
Conscience Canada Newsletter
Constructive Citizen Participation
Cross Cultural Communication Centre
Downtown Action
Ecomedia Bulletin
Economic Justice Report
Empathic Parenting
The Fisherman
Gatt-Fly Report
Global Health Project
Good Work News
Goodwin's
Green Living
Green Teacher
Guerilla
Harbinger
The Harder They Fall
Healthsharing
Human Rights Internet Reporter
Hysteria
IDERA
Issues & Actions
Kick It Over
Last Post
Lutte Ouvriere
Medical Reform
The Moment
The Mustard Seed
Mysterious East
Natural Life
New Breed Journal
New Canada
The New Catalyst
New Directions
New Maritimes
Newsletter - Challenge for Change
Newsletter - Dying With Dignity
A New Vision
Next Year Country
Nuclear Awareness Project Newsletter
Nuclear Free Press
Nurses For Social Responsibility
Octopus
One Sky Reporter
The Other Woman
Our Generation
Our Schools, Our Selves
Our Times
Outlook
Pacific Current
Pagans for Peace
Participatory Research Newsletter
The Patient's Advocate
The Peace Calendar
Peace Magazine
Peacetimes
Phoenix Rising
Pigeon Hill Peacemaking
Prairie Messenger
Press For Conversion
Probe Post
Quaker Committee On Jails & Justice
RIKKA
Rochdale Newsletter
Science for Peace Bulletin
Seven News
Seven Sisters Society Newsletter
Shunpiking
Social Justice Committee of Montreal
Southern Africa Report
Switchboard
Third World Resource Centre Newsletter
Tides of Change
Tightwire
Toronto Citizen
Toronto Clarion
Toronto Men's Clearinghouse Newsletter
Towards Justice in Health
Transformation
Upstream Journal
Vie Ouvriere
Waffle News
Wages for Housework
Women & Environments
Worker Co-op

Here is a glimpse of the materials found in the Connexions Archive.

<http://www.connexions.org/Archive/Glimpses.htm>

This document is available online at

www.connexions.org/Archive/ArchiveCaseStatement-FND2085.htm

Connexions Archive

489 College Street, Suite 305

Toronto ON M6G 1A5

Phone: 416-964-1511

Fax: 416-964-8763

E-mail: connexions@connexions.org

www.connexions.org

