

# Securing a future for the past

## In search of a new home for Connexions' grassroots archiving project

Connexions is searching for a new space to house its archive and those who work on it.

We are seeking a partner organization or sponsor(s) able to provide space or resources to make Connexions' continued work possible.

We are seeking help from individuals able to make the 'connections' to help open doors to help secure funding or space.

Connexions is a project founded in 1975 to keep alive and share the history of grassroots movements for social justice. It is a **physical archive** housing materials spanning more than 50 years of grassroots activism, an **electronic library**, and a **working group** which digitizes, describes, and indexes materials and makes 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 16 years, Connexions has been housed in space donated by a supportive organization. That space will be closing in the near future, 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 project 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 1,200 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.

If you think you can help, we would be happy to hear from you. (See other side for contact information.)

## Connexions: A people's history project

- Connexions exists to connect people concerned with social justice, freedom, and ecology, with information, ideas, groups, and with the history of social change movements.
- We are especially committed to *recovering and preserving the history of grassroots movements* for social justice and *making it accessible* to new generations. We believe in the importance of *peoples' history* – 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 and be inspired by them.
- The most visible public aspect of Connexions is the online **Connexions Library**. Users of **Connexions.org** find thousands of resources and groups searchable by subject, title/name, author, format, date published, etc. More than 70,000 visitors a month use the site, recording more than 300,000 page views each month.
- For Connexions' online library, we have devoted ourselves to:
  - \* Featuring quality resources of value to people concerned with justice and ecology.
  - \* Describing, abstracting, and indexing resources so users and search engines will be able to find and identify items most relevant to them.
  - \* Designing a multi-layered *indexing system* with extensive cross-references and an *intelligent search* technology that helps users *find related materials*. A key objective is to guide users not only to the resources they are looking for, but also to resources that they may not have thought of but which may be relevant to the subject being researched.
  - \* Connexions' search architecture is designed to provide a *deeper level of relevance* than is provided by search engines such as Google. At the same time, **Connexions.org** 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. This has helped make Connexions.org one of the *top 1% of websites worldwide* in terms of traffic.
- Behind Connexions' massive website is the **Connexions Archive**: a *living working archive*
  - \* The physical archive contains a vast amount of materials related to grassroots movements and citizen activism. The bulk of the content relates to grassroots groups in English Canada, from the 1960s to the present.
  - \* The archive is also a very busy project focused on making materials available to users worldwide by digitizing, abstracting, and indexing them. We have an *active group of volunteers* (based in more than a dozen countries) and a *dynamic internship program* with interns coming to Toronto from *more than 25 countries to work on the project*. Interns and volunteers catalogue and digitize materials already in the archive, and also select, index, and digitally archive current materials: e.g. key documents related to the Occupy movement have been digitally archived and made available through Connexions.org. We also maintain archived backups of a number of activist websites.
  - \* Space constraints force us to be very sparing in making new acquisitions, but our networking has highlighted a clear need to *acquire and secure other informal 'basement archives'* of valuable materials before they disappear. A number of individuals and small groups have archival materials in storage lockers, back rooms, basements, etc. which they want preserved and made available. Connexions is positioned to play an important role, in partnership with other organizations, in identifying and securing some of these invaluable people's histories.

## Building on the past to shape the future

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