Discussion Paper 1: Pre-Search Phase
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Before engaging in ground searches, it is useful to conduct background archival and oral history research. This paper focuses on some of the considerations regarding background research before undertaking ground searches for missing children and unmarked burials. There are several challenges that exist to engaging in the background research to support ground searches.

The work to locate missing children is far from complete. Continuous research will help determine what happened to the missing children at Residential Schools as the institutions provided families with little to no information about their deaths.[1] The research stage is a critical first step in commencing work on missing children and locating unmarked graves, to support and guide the on-ground searches, as well as the work if unmarked graves are located.

Challenge 1: Complexity of the research process
One of the most significant challenges in the researcher's quest for archival records is identifying where to search across the vast array of archival institutions. The decentralized aspect of record keeping can be overwhelming as there are millions of records dispersed across the country in various repositories. For example, just church records alone, there are over 100 different church repositories spread out across Canada each with their own set of documentation and variability in record management related to Residential Schools. Adding to this dilemma is the ways in which records moved across institutions over time. The Oblate records are a good example of record sets that traveled as their church restructured its organization over time forcing researchers to determine whether records were moved or if some were left behind in the shuffle. Between 1936 and 1944, some 200,000 Indian Affairs files were destroyed.[2] The Canadian government, as well as various entities within the Catholic Church have opened their collections, but countless records remain in their custody that have yet to be identified, digitized, and made available to Survivors and communities.

Given the decentralized nature of the records, researchers may need to broaden their search to government archives at the national, provincial, and municipal level, as well as various church repositories, such as Catholic, Anglican, United, or Presbyterian denominations. Local historical societies, museums, newspapers, university archives, and survey records related to land uses are other avenues to explore that may hold valuable information. The internet and social media can also be important tools for locating digital sources or making contacts with other survivors and their families. The extensive archival record available to researchers raises the questions, **how do we determine which archive has material relevant to our research questions? How do we incorporate information gleaned from records into the broader collective narrative of**

Residential Schools? Are there useful ways for collaboration (and information sharing) across communities when researching in different archives?

Challenge 2: Access and privacy limitations on accessing records
Likely, researchers will need to move beyond the archive to access information on the deaths of Indigenous individuals and families. Death records are essential documents held by various government agencies that help determine important life dates for Indigenous families and individuals. The state's unwillingness to exhibit full transparency with their records contributes to the complexity of gathering details on the death and burials of missing children. Death records from Provincial Vital Statistic agencies are generally open to the public if more than 20 years has passed since the time of death, but the retrieval process to access the documents can take months. Searching for information about an individual through vital statistics agencies also requires accurate knowledge of the individual's name and birth date, which can be problematic for researchers since birthdates, or the correct spelling of a child's name may not be known. Another complication is that vital statistics records for Indigenous people if they fall under the category of the "Indian Act" may be held by the federal government instead of provincial agencies.[3] There are also gaps in some provincial vital statistics records concerning Indigenous peoples.

Federal treaty annuity paylists are another resource to acquire information on Indigenous deaths. However, the lists are only available to the public up to December 31, 1909. Any information on paylists after that date requires an Access to Information and Privacy Request (ATIP) if the individual has been dead for at least 20 years. Documents held by government agencies that are subject to the Privacy Act, like the federal treaty annuity paylists, pose complications for researchers. Requests for information held by government agencies may be denied or withheld under the guise of protecting the record creator or the right of the donor. In addition, police and military records may contain valuable information on missing children, although these records may also be challenging to attain as authorities may be resistant to sharing sensitive documentation. Limitations to viewing the historical records begs the question: **how do we continue the research process if we encounter barriers to access information due to privacy laws? What are the possible avenues to address the necessary changes in access and privacy laws to ensure that communities have access to the data necessary to identify and locate missing children and unmarked burials?**

Challenge 3: Limitations in the actual records
When engaging in this background research it is important to understand the limitations of what can be found in the archival records to support ground searchers. Traditionally, researchers perceived archives as neutral repositories designed to house historical records. In recent decades, academics have robustly challenged this view arguing that archives are colonial structures grounded in Western knowledge systems that privilege a narrow, one-sided version of the past. Historian Adele Perry explains how at the core archives are about absences, "the absences in the archive are not neutral, voluntary, or strictly literal. They are…silences born of and perpetuated by violence and racial inequality."[4] Sources found in the archives are often the voices of society's privileged, white, and powerful. Researchers engaging with these archives during the pre-search research phase should be aware of the biases that will be present in the documents, as women, racialized minorities, and immigrant voices are often absent from the archival record.

Archivist Randall Jimerson reminds researchers, "We must listen attentively, search diligently, and imagine what is absent" during the research process.[5]

A vital way to counter these silences is to gather oral testimony about histories of the schools. Oral testimony should not be included to merely fill in the gaps of the written record; instead, the purpose is to establish a collaborative research process that looks for details in the historical record beyond the archive walls. Research on the appropriate methods of conducting ethical oral history must be done before engaging in this kind of work. Before interviews commence, training is required on how to conduct interviews, there needs to be an awareness of ethical and cultural considerations, and clear guidelines set on the storage and access of the materials collected. In their work on Indigenous oral history, Charles Trimble, Barbara Sommer, and Mary Quinlan lay out a guiding principle for conducting oral history with Indigenous participants: narrators deserve respect and must never feel exploited throughout the entirety of the oral history process.[6] Yet finding participants for this type of research venture may not always be a viable option. In some instances, Residential School Survivors or knowledge keepers may have passed away, community members may be unwilling to share their knowledge or experiences, or the community may not have relevant information on the subject matter. Considering these obstacles, questions to consider include: **How do we move forward in the research if there is a loss of community knowledge? How do we ethically bear witness to Survivor testimonies? What sort of information should be sought from Survivors to support ground searches? How do we follow community protocols when accessing and managing valued social memory?**

Challenge 4: Capacity of communities to engage in archival research

The rigid structure of institutional archives can discourage communities from engaging in this type of research work. Online archival databases are often difficult to navigate, and once records are located, searching through thousands of documents can be extremely time consuming. The sheer complexity of state, church, and private records is a labyrinth of bureaucracy that has the capacity to overwhelm even the most seasoned researcher. Many records may not be in English, or the written text may be illegible, resulting in a need for a translator or a research assistant, which can be a costly endeavor. Technical barriers, such as lack of access to the internet or a printer, which may be needed to fill out forms to request documentation, compounded with some of the other challenges can make archival research seem like an insurmountable task. Understanding some of these research hurdles leads to further questions for consideration: **What can archives and institutions do to make access easier for communities? How can archives and cultural institutions collaborate to make their collections more accessible? How can communities work together to overcome some of these difficulties? How can communities help support the work of lead or caretaker communities leading the research on former Residential Schools sites? How can we braid together community social memory and archival documentation to provide meaningful knowledge for research?**

Key Questions Going Forward

- Given the vast number of archival repositories across Canada, how do researchers determine where to search during the pre-search phase of missing children and unmarked

burial work? Once records are located, how do researchers incorporate information gleaned into the broader collective narrative of Residential Schools?

- How do we continue the research process if we encounter barriers to access information due to privacy laws or contend with lack of state transparency?
- Oral testimony is crucial to a collaborative research process, but how do we balance community expertise with academic research found in the archives? How do we conduct oral history if there is a loss of community knowledge? What sort of information should be sought from Survivors to support ground searches? What do we do with all of the "data" being created and collected with oral histories?
- What are some methods to employ when there is misinformation or silences in the archives? How do we find voices from the historical record that are excluded from the archive?
- What can archives and institutions do to make access easier for communities? How can archives and cultural institutions collaborate to make their collections more accessible? How can communities help support the work of lead or caretaker communities leading the research on former Residential Schools sites?
- There must be health and wellness support for communities engaging in this arduous work. What are some ways this can be provided?
- Are there other lateral projects that are engaging in this type of research work? What can we learn from their research efforts? How do you coordinate with other groups or projects doing similar work?
- How can records of multiple origins, relevant to multiple communities and nations to be shared?

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[1] Aimée Craft, Afterward in *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press/National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016), 192.

[2] Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Vol. 4 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 9.

[3] William Osborne and Anne Lindsay, "The Three Sisters," *At the Forks*, 27 July 2021, https://chrr.info/blog/the-three-sisters/.

[4] Adele Perry, "The Colonial Archive on Trial: Possession, Dispossession, and History in Delgamuukw V. British Columbia," in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 345.

[5] Randall C. Jimerson, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2009), 231.

[6] Charles E. Trimble, Barbara W. Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The American Indian Oral History Manuel: Making Many Voices Heard (*Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008), 35.