How do you preserve a million records when everyone has a million other things to do?
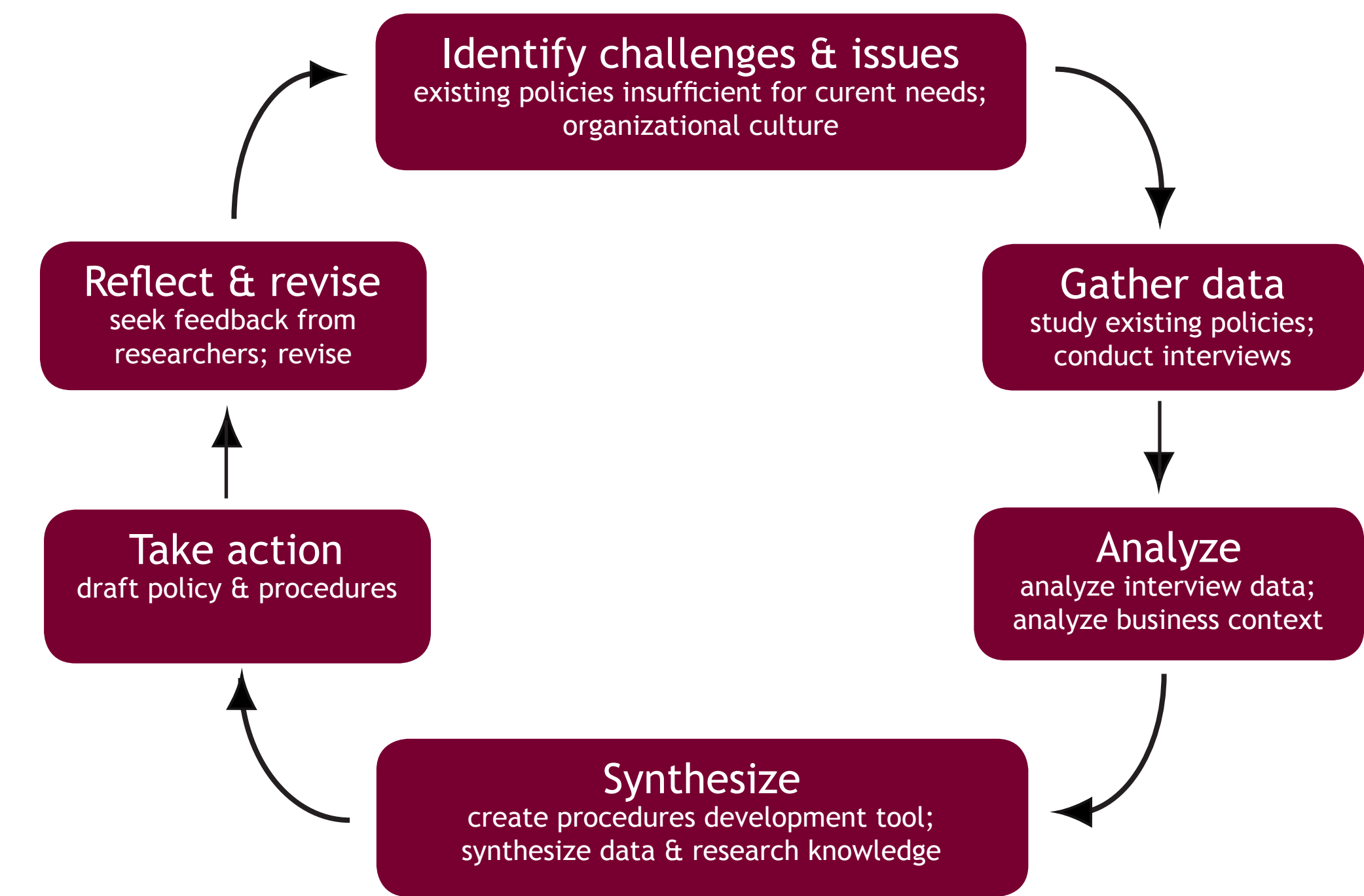
Development of Policy and Procedures for the Long-term Preservation of Digital Records
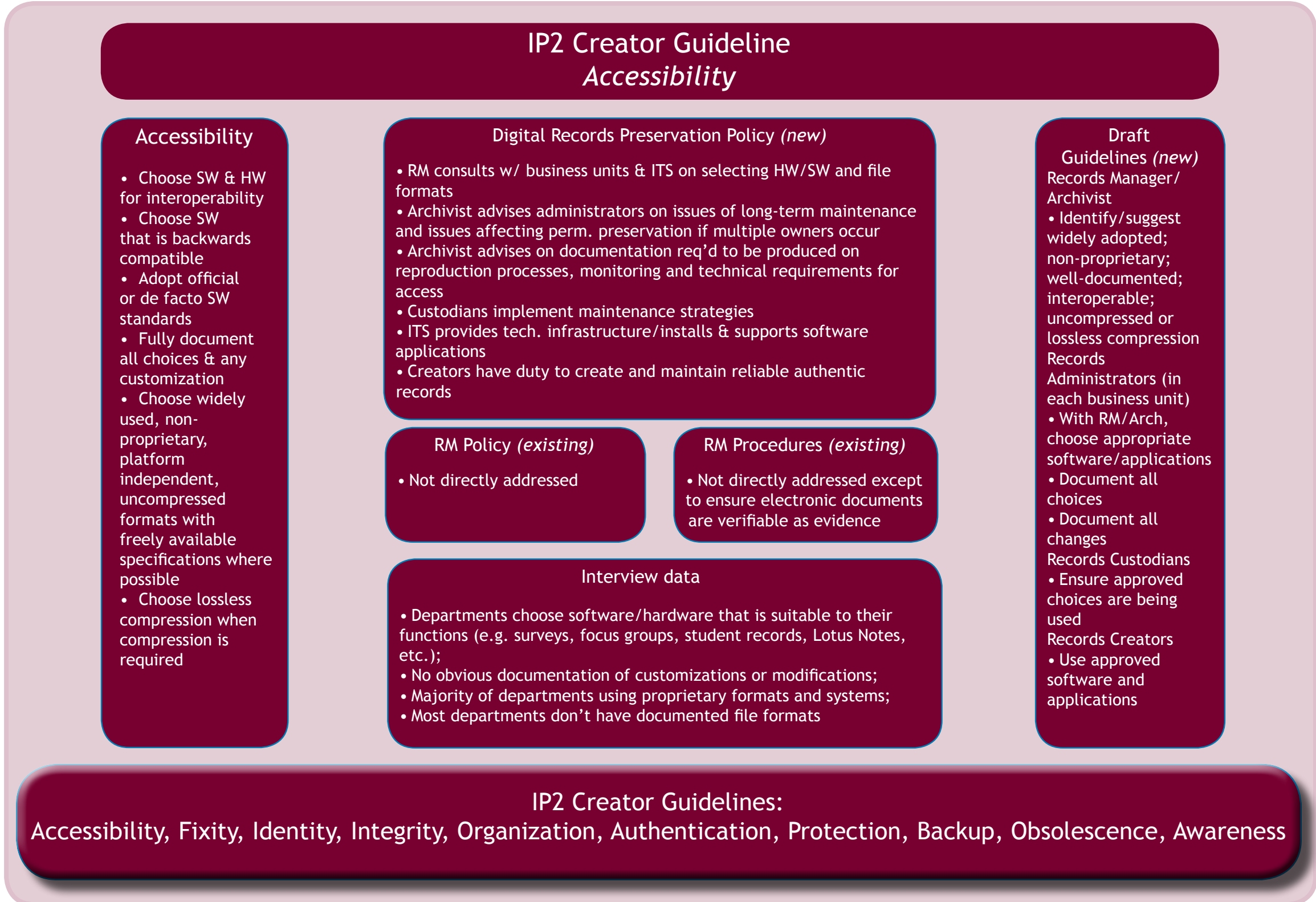
InterPARES 3 Case Study: BCIT

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Research Methodology

Abstract

How do you preserve digital records in a million-dollar organization when everyone has a million other things to worry about? This case study uses the InterPARES 2 *Framework for Policy Development* and the InterPARES 2 *Creator Guidelines* to find pragmatic solutions to the integration of archival requirements into a dynamic and complex environment. Challenges include integrating with existing policies and procedures, respecting institutional culture and adhering to best practice requirements and standards.

Background

British Columbia Institute of Techonogy (BCIT) is the province's largest post-secondary institution, offering certificate, diploma and applied bachelor's degrees. Over 2,000 faculty and staff have created more than 100 million digital records in need of management, disposition and long-term preservation. www.bcit.ca

The InterPARES 3 Project is the third phase of the International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems, which aims to develop the knowledge essential to the long-term preservation of authentic digital records. www.interpares.org

Objectives

To create a policy and procedures for the long-term preservation of authentic, reliable digital records. that will integrate with existing BCIT records management policies and be implementable within BCIT's organizational culture.

Challenges

- Two existing records management policies (RM, Archives & Special Collections);
- Established procedures to assure long-term preservation of analog records;
- 100 million digital records and growing;
- No policy or procedures for long-term preservation of digital records;
- Digital records subject to classification & retention, not fully implemented;
- Records at risk of loss due to technological obsolescence;
- FOI and privacy requirements.

We employed case study methodology, using semi-structured interviews and participatory and iterative analysis between researchers and subjects.

Identify challenges & issues — existing policies insufficient for curent needs; organizational culture

Gather data — study existing policies; conduct interviews

Analyze — analyze interview data; analyze business context

Synthesize — create procedures development tool; synthesize data & research knowledge

Take action — draft policy & procedures

Reflect & revise — seek feedback from researchers; revise

Procedures Development Tool

IP2 Creator Guideline
Accessibility

Accessibility
- Choose SW & HW for interoperability
- Choose SW that is backwards compatible
- Adopt official or de facto SW standards
- Fully document all choices & any customization
- Choose widely used, non-proprietary, platform independent, uncompressed formats with freely available specifications where possible
- Choose lossless compression when compression is required

Digital Records Preservation Policy *(new)*
- RM consults w/ business units & ITS on selecting HW/SW and file formats
- Archivist advises administrators on issues of long-term maintenance and issues affecting perm. preservation if multiple owners occur
- Archivist advises on documentation req'd to be produced on reproduction processes, monitoring and technical requirements for access
- Custodians implement maintenance strategies
- ITS provides tech. infrastructure/installs & supports software applications
- Creators have duty to create and maintain reliable authentic records

RM Policy *(existing)*
- Not directly addressed

RM Procedures *(existing)*
- Not directly addressed except to ensure electronic documents are verifiable as evidence

Interview data
- Departments choose software/hardware that is suitable to their functions (e.g. surveys, focus groups, student records, Lotus Notes, etc.);
- No obvious documentation of customizations or modifications;
- Majority of departments using proprietary formats and systems;
- Most departments don't have documented file formats

Draft Guidelines *(new)*
Records Manager/Archivist
- Identify/suggest widely adopted; non-proprietary; well-documented; interoperable; uncompressed or lossless compression
Records Administrators (in each business unit)
- With RM/Arch, choose appropriate software/applications
- Document all choices
- Document all changes
Records Custodians
- Ensure approved choices are being used
Records Creators
- Use approved software and applications

IP2 Creator Guidelines:
Accessibility, Fixity, Identity, Integrity, Organization, Authentication, Protection, Backup, Obsolescence, Awareness

Research Outcomes

Creation of procedures development tool to:
- synthesize existing policy and procedures with research data;
- respect existing organizational culture;
- adhere to the IP2 Framework for Policy Developement;
- incorporate IP2 Creator Guidelines.

Policy & Procedures that integrate with existing instruments, are supported by management, and are easily adopted by all business units, and support the long-term preservation of authentic, reliable digital records.
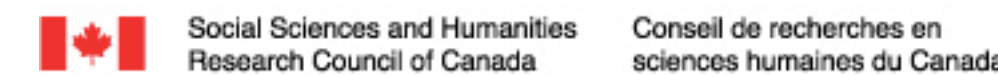
Next Steps

- A generic template for the development of procedures based on the matrix developed for this case study will be created for use in other sites;
- Implementation of policy and procedures will be tested in key business units throughout BCIT;
- Review existing records management and archives policies and procedures and update as necessary to align with new policy and procedures.

References & Acknowledgments

InterPARES Project: International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic System http://www.interpares.org. Dr. Luciana Duranti, Director. Corinne Rogers and Elizabeth Shaffer, graduate research assistants (current). Helen Callow and Brian Sloan, graduate research assistants (graduated).

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