newfoundland and labrador
library association

Contribution of the Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association to the Royal Society of Canada's Expert panel on the Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives

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Introduction

The following pages summarize the consultation conducted with the members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association, taken to gather information for a submission to the Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel on the Status and Future of Libraries and Archives.

During this consultation, the NLLA focused on the experience specific to libraries and archives in this province, which means the exclusion of many notable issues that affect libraries and archives, such as concerns over Libraries and Archives Canada.

One of the challenges the association experienced in responding to the inquiries of the Expert Panel was the specific nature of the questions. There are many types of libraries, with different constituencies and different objectives. Several members of the association expressed discomfort determining the services, programs, projects and outreach for the libraries of the future.

The survey of the members suggests that the future of libraries will be driven by People, Information and Communities. People who work in libraries will continue to provide the expertise and access. Library workers need to be given the necessary support to be proactive in determining community needs and a path for the future of their libraries. Libraries are community centres, gathering places. The collections and materials purchased are for the benefit of their communities. Libraries provide information, but the people in them also help communities chart pathways through the overabundance of information, to locate the most relevant information. Libraries support strong communities by providing people with the information, either analogue or digital, that they need to be critical thinkers, to create, to build and to grow.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association

The Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association advocates on behalf of its members on matters affecting libraries, their service providers, and their clients, provincially and nationally. It facilitates the exchange of ideas and information among people interested in the development and support of libraries and their services, stimulates rapport and encourages unity of purpose among all people working in, or otherwise serving libraries and organizes such events to carry out the above aims and objectives.

Members of our association include librarians and library workers from academic, public and government or specialized libraries. There are also a few retired library workers in our association.

Background on Libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador

With the diverse membership of the association, our response to the call for contributions will reflect this perspective, offering insight to government, public and academic libraries. The libraries that operate within Newfoundland and Labrador experience a unique set of factors that will shape future development and are present in the day to day operations of libraries.

1. Government support: Unlike most other libraries, financial support for the public library system comes from the provincial government, through a provincial board. This support has been significantly cut back in the past year, as the 2013-14 budget was 1.2 million less than the previous year. There are 9 librarians for the 96 libraries across the province. A number of IT staff also lost their jobs. Workload has been redistributed. Many librarians lost their jobs, and received new ones at lower pay and high levels of responsibility. At the same time, a librarian and IT workers lost work in the legislative library. These cuts came with little warning. The cuts have compromised the ability of these library staff workers to develop a long term plan for their libraries. Similar cuts were applied to the legislative library.
   The University Library system, also closely linked to the provincial government, is similarly facing a period of uncertainty. At the time of writing, the library had been warned of impending cuts. On a federal level, the DFO library is closing its doors. The current library environment in Newfoundland and Labrador is one of uncertainty.
2. Literacy and Numeracy rates in NL: According to the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Canada sits right on the OECD average for literacy rates. Most of the provinces fall about the average of 273.3 – NB has a score of 268.3, and QUE has

268.6. Newfoundland sits well below, at 265.4, ahead only of Northwest Territories (253.3) and Nunavut (219.1). Numeracy is lower than the literacy rates. The Canadian average is 265.5, below the OECD average of 269.4. NL has an average of 251.9, ahead of only Northwest Territories and Nunavut. There is a lot of work for educators and libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador.

These problems need to be considered when addressing the future of libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador, as they profoundly shape the current landscape.

The Problems

In response to a survey, the members of the NLLA responded by noting a number of problems with the current library systems that will affect future development.

Academic Libraries

1. Government perceives that physical libraries aren't important.

2. Lack of libraries with a vision of where libraries should be.

3. Lack of computer and computer services. Lack of proper IT support.

4. Problem with the shift to digital - trying to model electronic sources off of print sources. Vendors not catching up to technology - makes libraries look like they can't keep up.

Public Libraries

1. Inconvenient hours

2. Not receiving support from the government to purchase the necessary equipment to keep up with changes – if the staff do not have the ability to keep up with requests, libraries will be useless.

3. Lack of librarians to visualize the future. Lack of computer and computer services. Need to be less reactionary and more visionary.

4. Massive cuts - 1.2 million - targeting the professional libraries to manage the 96 libraries. 5 Librarians laid off, leaving 9. Many forced to take pay cuts.

5. Need more IT support.

6. Hard to be motivated.

The Strengths

According to the membership, libraries have a number of strengths:

All Libraries:

1. Libraries provide the expertise to people who require research assistance - free access to resources that aren't free and that people would not have otherwise.

2. Librarians are often the only people advocating for users' rights and equitable and fair access to information

Academic Libraries

1. Librarians can be more embedded in blended and online learning environments through pre-recorded video, live video, chat and other technologies.

2. Libraries can provide wellness and destressing programs during exam periods.

3. Libraries can offer a place of community, and research space on campus

Public Libraries

1. Continuing programming despite cut backs. The library staff often uses very limited resources to bring to their communities the services that that particular community needs, including life-long learning programs

2. Libraries are a community and social hub, with varied locations across the province, including town halls, arts and culture centres and strip malls.

Conclusion

The membership of the Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association want to stress three components of libraries for the Expert panel; People, Information, and Community.

1. People

For the members of NLLA, the future of libraries is directly connected to people - the people who work in libraries and those who reside in the communities'. Libraries cannot exist without these people - those who have the information and research needs, and those who have the research and information expertise and can advocate on behalf of their communities. The future of libraries needs to have a flexible structure, so that those with the knowledge of libraries and the community can be pro-active in identifying and implementing services - whatever the platform, interface or service module - that best services their community.

2. Information

As the volume of information increases, communities need the expertise provided libraries more so than ever. But as the diverse range of tools offered by the digital shift increases, traditional resources are still needed by communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. With poor literacy and numeracy rates, the library offers the tools to help address these shortcomings.

With their funding, libraries provide communities access to costly information sources, data, and the internet - helping businesses, students, and curious individuals obtain the information, research and data they require. This information should be placed at a point where the community can access it, so that it can be used to the community benefit. Access to these sources improve the quality of life for the communities - improving business practices, informing decision making, and helping developing improved reading habits and critical, and creative, thinking. Libraries are, and will continue to be, centres of knowledge creation.

The Expert Panel needs to remember that the libraries' themselves are not usually responsible for the user interfaces or platforms provided with their digital resources. Often these are the results of library vendors or publishers, who have had challenges keeping pace with the changes brought about by new digital realities.

3. Community

In the past few years, there has been a resurgence in the concept of library as place. Patrons come to the library building as a place to study, to socialize, to participate in events. Public and academic libraries are community centres.

 The library and library workers are geared to serve their constituency, providing the information and services required by the community. If libraries do not have the resources to respond, they cannot adequately serve as a community focused institution. The community needs libraries to support their information and intellectual needs, and libraries needs the support of the community and government. There needs to be an institutional flexibility to respond to community needs, whatever the format.