



**NEOS LIBRARY CONSORTIUM
SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA EXPERT PANEL ON THE STATUS AND FUTURE OF
CANADA'S LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES - DRAFT**

January 15, 2014

NEOS is a consortium of Alberta libraries that share resources and an integrated library system to provide easy access to information resources to their library clients. This collaboration among post-secondary, government and hospital libraries ensures cost-effective service delivery and supports seamless learning. Our consortium members were very pleased to have the opportunity for members of the NEOS Executive to engage in a dialogue with the RSC Expert Panel on the Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives last fall.

NEOS is pleased to be celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2014. The opportunity to discuss the future of Canada's libraries fit perfectly with our current strategic planning exercise. Our members believe that NEOS is an excellent example of collaboration between publicly-funded institutions. In addition to sharing collections and technology, we also have twenty years of social and intellectual capital developed that we can leverage to navigate changes in technology, user needs and funding. As we look to the future, we hope that NEOS will be seen as model for the development of library networks in Canada.

NEOS member libraries are pleased to make a submission to the Expert Panel. We offer the following responses to the Framing Questions and will be happy to engage in further conversation with the panel.

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

1. *What is the nature and make-up of your organization?*

NEOS is a consortium of Alberta libraries that share resources and an integrated library system (ILS) to provide easy access to information resources to their library clients. This collaboration among post-secondary, government and hospital libraries ensures cost-effective service delivery and supports seamless learning. NEOS also provides opportunities for training and learning for member library staff.

2. *Does your organization provide services directly to users or to members who make up the organization?*

The consortium provides services to the member libraries, which provide services to their users, as well as to the users of other member libraries and the community at large.

3. *Describe the services provided directly to users, and if they are Consortial in nature, please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services, particularly as they relate to Canadians.*
 - NEOS libraries share an ILS, including cataloguing, circulation and client database, which provides for direct access to collections and services for clients. The University of Alberta runs the ILS on behalf of all members, on a cost-recovery basis.
 - Clients of NEOS special libraries, including the staff of the Alberta Government and Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures, as well as the staff of Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health, have access to the academic scientific and medical collections in post-secondary libraries, encouraging learning and the spread of research in these work environments. Students and researchers in post-secondary institutions have ready access to collections beyond their own libraries.
 - Students and staff of member libraries have direct access to over 11 million items in the NEOS catalogue, in print and online. The NEOS collections include the University of Alberta library, the second largest research library in Canada, as well as specialized collections in other NEOS libraries.
 - Clients can request materials directly via the online catalogue to be delivered to their home library, which is faster and more cost effective than traditional Interlibrary Loan.
 - In 2012 NEOS clients collectively borrowed almost 800,000 items from their own libraries and over 100,000 items from other NEOS libraries.
 - Services and future development are defined and refined in the strategic planning process, which is done collaboratively with member libraries.
 - In terms of measurement, NEOS seeks feedback from member libraries on a regular basis. Member libraries measure the impact of library services on their own clients.

4. *Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?*
See Services section below.

5. *What inhibits you from providing library services that ultimately would improve library/archive services to Canadians?*
 - Lack of funds
 - Copyright restrictions
 - Licensing restrictions, on ebooks particularly, that hamper sharing of digital collections

6. *What do you see as the challenges for libraries and archives in the forthcoming years?*
See Services section below.

SERVICES

1. *How would you describe the services Canadians, including Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in Canada?*
 - Library service to Canadians is very much a patchwork of different levels of access and collections. Strong parallels can be drawn to other public services such as health care and education. Libraries in large urban areas tend to be better funded and staffed than those in isolated rural areas.

- The Internet has done a great deal to bring an increased range and depth of materials to smaller libraries, but governments could do a more consistent job of providing high-speed Internet and newer computers to small libraries.
2. *Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?*
- The incorporation of new technologies into traditional libraries has presented libraries with three main challenges:
 - Capacity – many libraries struggle to provide infrastructure to support the housing of traditional collections while at the same time providing access to computers and to the Internet bandwidth needed to support them.
 - User Demand for New Technology – Public interest in electronic books, expensive databases and PC workstations often outstrips libraries’ ability to meet demands due to restrictions on budgets and licensing issues.
 - User Skills – Library staff in all types of libraries devote significant amounts of time to instructing users on basic computer skills, using social media and conducting searches.
3. *How do libraries and archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?*
- Traditional measures of library usage, such as circulation and in-person visits are being subsumed by more holistic outcome measures such as
 - user surveys
 - e-metrics
 - cost-effectiveness
 - institutional outcomes
 - research outcomes
 - learning outcomes
4. *Are libraries the appropriate institutions to catalog, store, and provide access to research data? If not, which institutions should provide these services?*
- Yes, just as there are different types of libraries, those libraries will have different types of collections and the expertise to work with research data.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

1. *Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?*
- The NEOS library consortium is well-known and highly appreciated within its sectoral user communities. We are also aware of the need to ensure that our home organizations and our provincial government are aware of our excellent service and return on investment.
2. *Describe the services provided directly to users within your context, or whether they are consortial in nature; please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services.*
- NEOS libraries share an ILS, including cataloguing, circulation and client database, which provides for direct access to collections and services for clients. The University of Alberta runs the ILS on behalf of all members, on a cost-recovery basis.

- Clients of NEOS special libraries, including the staff of the Alberta Government and Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures, as well as the staff of Alberta Health Services and Covenant Health, have access to the academic science and medical collections in post-secondary libraries, encouraging learning and the spread of research in these work environments. Students and researchers in post-secondary institutions have ready access to collections beyond their own libraries.
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- Services and future development are defined and refined in the strategic planning process, which is done collaboratively with member libraries.
- In terms of measurement, NEOS seeks feedback from member libraries on a regular basis. Member libraries measure the impact of library services on their own clients.

4. *In the digital era, what support for patrons do/should libraries provide?*

- While our collections have changed dramatically in the past twenty years, personal service to users is still a fundamental part of all NEOS libraries. Our goal is to help our users access the resources we provide and our library staff provide thousands of hours of one-on-one instruction and classroom teaching to users each year.

5. *What in your opinion are the specific roles of libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building?*

- Collaborative library groups have a potential role in memory-keeping in the creation of collaborative digital archives and repositories.
- NEOS is a mechanism for preserving last copies of print publications, via the University of Alberta storage facility. This storage facility is reaching capacity.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Digitization

1. *What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?*

- The principal challenges of born-digital materials for NEOS libraries are:
 - Supporting the ever increasing bandwidth requirements of digital material.
 - Obtaining licensing agreements that are affordable and workable in our different contexts.
 - Preserving access to Government information. Government information is particularly susceptible to frequent change and removal from public websites. Libraries face challenges in providing access to and archiving this material.

2. *What will be the function and future of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in a paperless future?*
 - NEOS libraries certainly expect that libraries will continue to adapt to changing technology and user needs, but we don't see our libraries disappearing. Libraries will still have a physical presence, but we are watching the following trends:
 - Relocation and consolidation of legacy print collections to off-site storage facilities.
 - Blending of libraries with information commons, maker spaces, academic support centres and departmental research bureaus.
 - Continued recognition of the library as "community space".

Education

1. *What changes, in your judgment, are necessary in the professional education and training of librarians/archivists in the 21st century?*
 - Many positive changes have occurred in library and information studies programs in the past ten years, e.g. much greater focus on information technology use and design.
 - Degree programs that combine library and information studies with other graduate studies such as humanities computing or MBA programs.
 - Increasing opportunities for practicum placements, co-op programs and other experiential learning would provide tremendous value to MLIS candidates.

2. *What conversations do you think need to take place with library, archival, and information studies programs about professional competency requirements, and have they begun?*
 - NEOS member library staff were active in the recent accreditation process for the University of Alberta School of Library and Information Studies, which included communication about the competencies needed by SLIS graduates in their early careers, as well as about continuing professional education for later career librarians.

Resources

1. *Public libraries are primarily funded by local municipalities, with little funding from any other level of government. Many towns and rural communities are too small to support needed technology. How do we encourage the creation of library systems (or consortia) that can meet the increasingly sophisticated technology-driven needs of libraries—whether urban or rural?*
 - Alberta has been fortunate in seeing the creation of collaborative ventures such as the regional library systems, The Alberta Library, the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network and NEOS, but their survival depends on reliable provincial funding.

2. *Assuming academic host institutions have financial resource constraints, and assuming academic libraries are equally constrained, how might these libraries attract funding adequate to meet the expectations of their users?*
 - The NEOS Library consortium is an excellent example of collaboration that has allowed our libraries to gain efficiencies by sharing
 - 11 million items between 17 members in central and northern Alberta.
 - technical expertise
 - ILS licensing costs

- Direct provincial and federal government support for expansion of NEOS and/or creation of other multi-type library consortia would definitely help our libraries to shift more spending into acquiring content.
3. *What percentage increase to your current budget would permit you to realize the aspirations of your users? If you received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, describe your library/archives in 2017.*
- Restoration of funding cuts made in the last few years followed by annual increases at a minimum equivalent to CPI would be a good start to moving toward healthy libraries.
 - We would like to see the evolution of NEOS into NEOS 2.0: a larger, regional multi-type library consortium that receives funding directly from our provincial government.

Benefits, Best Practices and Potential for Replication of the NEOS Model

After our meeting with panel member Ernie Ingles, the NEOS Executive thought it might be useful to set out the benefits of the consortium and the practices that have resulted in its success. We believe that this model of a shared ILS among different library types is a useful model for other libraries to consider.

Our collaboration among post-secondary, government and hospital libraries ensures cost-effective service delivery and supports seamless learning. Most NEOS libraries are funded by provincial tax dollars, and NEOS enables Albertans to have access to the libraries of universities and colleges, Alberta government libraries and Alberta Health Services libraries, to promote formal and informal learning.

Through collaboration and sharing existing resources, all NEOS libraries are strengthened, and the students and staff of members are supported as they achieve their goals in learning, research and working life.

Access to collections

- Students and staff have direct access to over 11 million items in NEOS libraries, including the University of Alberta library, the second largest research library in Canada, as well as the specialized collections in other NEOS libraries. In 2012 NEOS clients collectively borrowed almost 800,000 items from their own libraries and over 100,000 items from other NEOS libraries.
- NEOS libraries have expedited delivery arrangement with the University of Alberta Libraries, providing for quicker and more cost-effective access to articles.
- Distance learners are supported as they are able to request and pick up library materials in NEOS branches across the province.

Cost Avoidance

- Member libraries share in IT staffing costs, as well as hardware and licensing costs.

- Direct requests for items within NEOS are faster and much more cost effective than the alternative of Interlibrary Loan.
- The delivery system among NEOS libraries involves shipping many items together, minimizing shipping costs, compared with ILL.
- Member libraries share costs for an annual conference and continuing education events.
- Member libraries have access to copy cataloguing resources, which streamlines the cataloguing process.
- The shared collection supports variations in demand for items and maximizes available resources. For example, if the University of Alberta's copy of a book is out, a student might borrow Red Deer College's copy. Although all libraries are expected to maintain a collection that supports their clients' needs, other collections can often be used to avoid buying extra copies.

Seamless learning for Albertans

- Students moving from one post-secondary institution to another are familiar with the shared integrated library system and request process.
- Scholars have easy access to a large collection of academic resources to support their research.
- Clients can make use of collections of strength in various libraries.
- Most NEOS libraries are supported by Albertans' tax dollars. NEOS enables Albertans to have access to the libraries of Alberta's universities and colleges, Alberta government libraries and Alberta Health Services libraries.

Staff Training and Development

- NEOS library staff participate in an annual conference, which highlights new directions and opportunities for libraries, as well as workshops addressing aspects of library service.
- Staff work with peers in other libraries to leverage expertise to solve day to day problems and improve workflow and technical issues.

Governance

- Each member institution appoints an individual (usually the library director) to be the NEOS Director.
- Each member institution appoints a representative to the Access Services and Technical Services Committees.
- The University of Alberta is the service provider for all members, and runs the ILS on their behalf.
- There is a shared patron databases and shared catalogue. The catalogue uses the principle of one bibliographic record to which all libraries add copies.

Values and Community

- NEOS is based on values of excellent service to clients, collaboration, accountability and integrity.
- Libraries aim to move beyond pure self- interest and build interdependence.

- We aim to build trust and to value the common good.
- In decision-making we try for consensus where possible.
- We have a strong, evolving policy framework.