

February 18th 2014

Dr. Patricia Demers, FRSC, Chair (University of Alberta)
Royal Society of Canada
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Dear Dr. Demers:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you in Toronto at OISE and the Ontario Library Association's Super Conference. We enjoyed our conversations and have high expectations of the quality and due diligence of the Royal Society's investigations as a result.

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a non-profit with a mandate to benefit Ontario public libraries through advocacy, research, and marketing. We have an eagle's eye-view of the issues facing our sector as it seeks to maintain and increase our impact on Canada's success economically, culturally, socially and as a learning society.

Attached is a small summary of FOPL's goals and action priorities. FOPL Board chair, Ian Ross, and I feel that our discussions with you and Ken Roberts were very positive and beneficial. We committed to send you a short list of recommendations that we would like to see in your report that would benefit our community and, ultimately, Canadians, as a whole. We are outlining five issues and FOPL recommendations in this letter.

Issue No. 1: Standards for Library Statistics and Measurements

In the 1980's Statistics Canada declined to continue their collection of library statistics on a Canada-wide basis. Library and Archives Canada (LACBAC) has reduced or eliminated activities and positions in this area as well. As such, this important sector for economic impact, employment, culture, and learning support has been neglected for decades. The lack of valid and comparable data across jurisdictions is felt in many ways. Compared to the United States, where national statistics are collected on a comparable, standard, longitudinal, public domain on a national basis by IMLS

and NCES as well as by ARL and ACRL for all 51 state-level jurisdictions (including DC), this is major problem in managing libraries in Canada. Canada's library statistics are a patchwork quilt of initiatives where only about 7 provinces have accessible data and no territories. This is unsustainable and public access, comparability and use are huge issues.

Recommendation: FOPL recommends that the Royal Society report consider a recommendation that our national organizations, government in particular, fund and lead a comprehensive data coordination and collection of library statistics and provide tools, reports, and leadership on library outcomes and impact measurements. This could be accomplished with a mandated national agency (like Statistics Canada or LACBAC) or a government / association / institutional / private sector partnership that sets standards and coordinates local and provincial/territorial data collection and public open access.

Issue No. 2: Library Service for Native Canadians

Again, there is a patchwork quilt across Canada of services, on and off reserve, for native Canadians. In the recent Federal Budget, the government committed to major multi-billion dollar investments in native schools and upgrading the education delivered there. Libraries are a proven strategy to deliver improved, impactful student learning and performance. School and public library partnerships are also a proven method by which these investments in education can be made sustainable and have an impact on whole communities beyond school hours and K-12 learners. FOPL-funded OISE research also shows the long term impact of public library programs on school readiness and performance in educational settings.

Recommendation: FOPL recommends that the Royal Society report consider a recommendation that acknowledges the issues in learning, cultural and economic support for our native Canadian citizens and that funding for reserve libraries for school and public use be given a priority by all levels of government – federal, provincial / territorial, and local based on the positive and cost-effective socio-economic impacts and the performance of communities. Removing the barriers to success driven by competing funding models federally, provincially and locally and the chronic underfunding of libraries for native Canadians is a highly desirable goal that creates sustainable infrastructure for social, economic, learning and cultural success for this challenged and important community.

Issue No. 3: Promoting Libraries Beyond the Public Good

Libraries in all sectors are challenged to represent their value and return on public investment. Recent studies in our sector, public libraries, show that this is a major return for communities on so many levels. The recent, independent, University of Toronto Martin Prosperity Institute report for Toronto Public Library is a great example of this type of value for money study. That said, better statistics and measurements as recommended earlier, are insufficient to change policy-makers and public opinion as to the value of libraries. We risk damaging essential infrastructure for the Canadian economy, memory institutions, and learning supports through uninformed public policy and opinion. While local libraries have gotten much better at using the tools of marketing and promotion, there is a crying need for an overall branding and positioning communication program to highlight the changes in libraries for the 21st value of libraries in this Century.

Recommendation: FOPL recommends that the Royal Society report consider a recommendation that encourages the development of a national plan for promoting the roles of libraries in Canada. Such models as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiatives in the U.S. as well as the OCLC Geek the Library campaign or ALA's @YourLibrary and READ initiatives are worth investigation but exist in a materially different national culture and funding environment. There needs to be a Canada-wide, sector-wide comprehensive initiative that engages all players in implementation and planning as well as engages the general public and policy-makers in the role libraries play in changing lives for the better.

Issue No. 4: Library and Archives Canada and Federal Libraries

We have no doubt that you are now well-informed on the key issues that have played out over the last few years in the deterioration, loss, underfunding and mismanagement of our national information libraries and vaults as well as our cultural and scientific memory and institutions. We are very distressed about this in our sector and see your independent, consultative, and scholarly approach to the library sector in Canada as an opportunity to continue the pressure on government to protect and enhance access to our public knowledge and cultural heritage.

Recommendation: FOPL recommends that the Royal Society report consider a recommendation that acknowledges the damage done, potential future damage and the risks of loss of knowledge for the cultural and scientific record. This recommendation should consider encouraging restoring and increasing funding to our national memory institutions as well as increasing funding for digitization and public open access. Lastly, LACBAC should be encouraged and permitted to carry out its legal mandate with proper funding, respect and appropriately trained and experienced leadership.

Issue No. 4: Equitable Access



All of our recommendations above are in the context of one shared value in our sector – equity of access.

Recommendation: FOPL recommends that the Royal Society report consider a recommendation that encourages all levels of government to adopt this as a principle. This would mean that restrictive crown copyright policies in so many governments would be reduced. It would also mean that open access to government reports, simplifying access to government information and freedom of information, statistics, information and data would be put in terms of removing barriers rather than increasing the maze of issues we and our users encounter.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us and review this letter. We greatly look forward to your report and its content and recommendations in the context of building a greater Canada. Please remember that we are at your service should you desire further conversations, advice or help.

Sincerely,

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The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is a non-profit with a mandate to benefit Ontario public libraries through advocacy, research, and marketing.
La Fédération des bibliothèques publiques de l'Ontario est un organisme à but non-lucratif. Elle a comme mandat, de répondre aux besoins de toutes les bibliothèques, en concentrant leurs efforts dans la recherche, en marketing et en agissant comme plaidoyer.

CC:

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Darren Gilmour, Executive Director, RSC, dgilmour@rsc-src.ca

What is FOPL?

Simply put: Ontario's Public Libraries. Now more than ever before, they play a critical role in the social, educational, cultural and economic success of the communities in our province. Public Libraries are an essential investment in the future of our communities and are essential drivers of success in school preparedness, reading readiness, economic and employment success, and social equity. As the development of the knowledge economy progresses, public libraries are a vital link for every resident and every community to ensure success of all Ontarians, regardless of location or background.

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries represents Ontario's over 400 public library systems exceeding 1,000 branches in virtually every Ontario community. Over 5 million Ontario residents make hundreds of millions of visits to the library, in person and virtually, *every* year. Libraries are trusted, accessible community hubs providing freely accessible professional service, technology, programs, and resources to a more diverse range of residents than any other cultural institution. Ontarians have voted with their library cards and passionate support for public libraries continues to grow in the digital age.

Ontario public library services have evolved to be much more than books and buildings. Today's libraries have a measurable and valuable impact on the quality of life and the success of our communities – economically, socially, educationally, and culturally. FOPL ensures that funders and decision-makers know the full breadth and depth of the role of public libraries in Ontario, and advocates for the needed support, programs, and resources to continue to make a difference for all Ontarians. The Public Library value proposition is strong and includes (but isn't limited to):

- **Return on Investment:**
Many studies show that public investment in libraries delivers a measurable, positive return on investment economically, socially and for the capacity of communities to attract businesses and residents.
- **Economic Development:**
Supporting small business and entrepreneurs who will drive local economic recovery, growth, and job creation by providing them with resources such as databases on market trends and information on regulatory obligations;
- **Employment Support:**
Providing services and resources for career planning, job search, education, and upgrading skills;
- **Welcoming New Canadians:**
Helping newcomers to Canada succeed through settlement support; language acquisition including ESL programs, accreditation and employment support and maintaining cultural connections;
- **Early Literacy Development:**
Supporting success in life and reading and school readiness through a vast array of pre-school and children's literacy programs;
- **Support for Formal Education and Homework Help:**
Professional help and collections to support learners of all ages to develop advanced information fluency competencies, do research and complete projects. Open longer hours than school libraries, public libraries are also critical support systems for adult distance education and home schooling. Across the province, libraries are busier than ever with students at all ages and stages;

- **Serving the whole community:**
Public libraries ensure that the *whole* community of Ontarians – including those with visual or physical limitations, from any cultural or language community, natives, and more – receive equitable access to the resources of our society for success.
- **Equitable access to community resources:**
Public libraries are often the only place where all residents can access free computing resources, the internet, peripherals, training, and assistance to accomplish their goals as citizens, workers, and more.
- **Access to Government Services:**
Providing professional support services, accessible locations, and technology infrastructure to serve as a major access point for e-government; Public Libraries provide cost-effective opportunities to reach Ontarians to deliver government services for everything from forms and information to advice;
- **Questions Deserve Quality Answers:**
Ontarians have important information needs and deserve quality answers regardless of their economic status or location. On issues of health, parenting, finance, life choices, and more, libraries go beyond Google to improve the quality of questions and answers.
- **Cultural Vitality:**
A critical piece of a community's cultural framework, public libraries are essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability; and local history heritage.
- **Affordable Leisure Activities:**
Offering free borrowing of books, music and movies and exciting library programs for children, families, seniors, and people of all ages and tied directly to community needs and demand.

FOPL's specific communication priorities for 2014:

