

BRITISH COLUMBIA LIBRARIES

A BRIEF FOR

THE HONORABLE GEORGE ABBOTT

**MINISTER OF COMMUNITY, ABORIGINAL AND
WOMEN'S SERVICES**

Monday, April 07, 2003

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Executive Summary

The Associations representing the public libraries of British Columbia would like to thank the Minister for meeting with them. We also acknowledge and thank the Minister for his support of public libraries to date. The Associations believe that the effectiveness of this support is demonstrated by the continuing benefits that public libraries provide to their users.

British Columbia's libraries continue to be a "quiet" success story. Public Library Services statistics show that in 2001, there were a total of 25,555,620 visits by British Columbians to their local library. It has been quoted that people visit their library twice as much as they attend the movies. Library visitors borrowed close to 50 million items and asked over four million reference questions. 670,000 British Columbians attended a story time, book club, Internet class or some other program at their library.

Libraries continue to do this work while support from various levels of government remains stagnant. Libraries have become skilled at attracting revenue from "non-traditional" sources. And of course, statistics show that expenditures have remained constant as a percentage of the library's total budget.

Public libraries enhance the lives of all British Columbians and are instrumental to the economic well being of the communities they serve. An informed and literate public is key to B.C.'s economic health. We look forward to continuing to work with Public Library Services Branch and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (MCAWS) to provide the libraries that the people of British Columbia require and deserve.

KEY ISSUES:

PROVINCIAL FUNDING

As we move into year two of MCAWS' Service Plan Summary, we want to again thank The Minister for maintaining the level of Provincial Government funding (\$130 million per budget year) until 2004/2005 for Public Libraries and the Library Services Branch. Both are crucial in the delivery of services to British Columbians. At our UBCM reception last fall, we were pleased with the Minister's announcement to provide funding to InterLINK for the Audio Books Program.

However, again we want to bring to your attention that, in the long term, there continues to be the need to press for an increase in BC's per capita grant (following the goal of a balanced budget by 2004). With no funding increase since 1991, having the provincial average for this grant (as a percentage of total revenue) drop from 10% to 6% in the 90's, and being at half the average of funding in the Western provinces illustrates the need for an additional \$8 million annually.

In the interim, a move to grandfather this grant, for the next two years, to rural communities with declining populations, would assist them in these difficult times.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

We were extremely pleased to see the RFP for a Draft Strategic Plan for Public Libraries issued on Jan 7, 2003. Of great interest to us will be the strategies established for input from the stakeholder groups. We thank the Public Library Services Branch for organizing a panel discussion, at the Spring Conference in Harrison, around an "issues paper" and look forward to participating in this opportunity. One of the priorities for our associations is to insure that the vision for the province's public libraries recognizes the vital role played by the Public Library Services Branch (PLSB). Despite limited staff and resources, PLSB has excelled in developing well-focused programs that have proven to be a catalyst in further developing province wide library resources. These include such programs as Outlook Online, Summer Reading Club, and Youth@B.C. Many of these programs have involved other departments of government and drew funding from a variety of sources, which has added to their strength and effectiveness. They have also been used to further enhance the relationship between PLSB and our associations. A strong and effective PLSB must be the cornerstone of any strategic plan for British Columbia's public libraries.

If there are other ways in which our organizations could participate in this important and timely plan, we would be pleased to do so.

PREMIER'S TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

The Associations were pleased to note the release of the fourth report of the Premier's Technology Council (PTC) on March 27th. We were especially pleased at the explicit connection of your government's efforts to the Innovation Strategy initiative of the federal government. We strongly believe that libraries will play a vital role in making British Columbia "a top technology centre in the world". For many users who are being introduced to these new technologies, the library is their first access point. BC's public libraries were quick to adopt and adapt to these new learning tools, and continue to be community leaders in providing training, as well as points of access.

The PTC's stated priority of broadband access will be crucial to libraries being able to provide, and indeed, enhance their services in this area. Libraries throughout the province have benefited from programs to develop Internet access, but have also found it necessary to allocate funds from other areas to cover the ever-increasing demand for access. We trust that as the PTC continues to develop strategies to provide broadband access on an equitable basis through British Columbia, the issue of sustainability will be paramount. We look forward to continuing to play a part in this process.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As you are well aware, public libraries play a key role in an Information Age. We would like to refer you to two documents:

- **Canada's Libraries: Innovating to Meet the Needs of a Knowledge-based Economy, July 2002.**
This excellent brief was prepared by a CLA task force chaired by Edel Toner-Ragola, Chief Librarian, Prince George Public Library, in response to the Government of Canada's Innovation Strategy. It clearly outlines the vital role of public libraries in meeting the challenges of an increasing knowledge-based economy.
- **BC Libraries: Valuable Resources for B.C.'s Economic Success, Sept 2002.**
This is the BCLA's response to the Government of Canada's Innovation Strategy. It focuses on how B.C.'s libraries contribute, could contribute further, and need to be strengthened to partner with Government in the race to achieve Canada's vision of becoming a world leader in this area.

COMMUNITY CHARTER

As a follow-up to our meeting of January 31, 2002, we are still interested in any implications on the governance and funding of public libraries that may result from the implementation of the Community Charter Legislation.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF RURAL LIBRARIES

As Government services are cut back in rural areas the demand for information from the public libraries often increases. For example, in the Creston area the public library has accepted both the Law Library from a closed Court House and the Agriculture Library from a closed office. This has increased the workload and the need for increased space in the library. In cases such as this, it makes sense for the library to house these resources and to offer assistance in their use. It shows that there is a willingness for libraries to partner with Government to offer services to the public. It also supports the need for increased funding in these instances. A ‘dispersion allowance’ may be one solution?

LEGACY PROGRAM

We would like to introduce the idea of establishing a Library Legacy Program for British Columbia similar to the *Lois Hole Library Legacy Program* established by Library Alberta. To that end, it is suggested that a steering committee, comprised of the stakeholder groups, be created. This program would not only honor an individual who has contributed to the success of the library community, but would be an opportunity for broad provincial recognition of the many volunteers who contribute hundreds of hours regionally, provincially and nationally to the sustainability and improvement of the library community. Volunteer recognition and celebration could occur annually for these “Legacy Contributors”/“Provincial Good Citizenship Awards for Library Volunteers”. Such a program could have local and regional components.

The thrust of a legacy program is to solicit financial support for the library community through donations in the name of those honored. Information on the Alberta program is available at – www.visityourlibrary.net.

Provincial input and support for the creation, implementation and sustainability of the above idea would be crucial. British Columbia, the partner organizations and most of all – libraries would benefit from a Legacy Program.

Thank you for reviewing these areas of interest with us and we look forward to our continuing partnership in the provision of superior library services throughout British Columbia.

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