

BRITISH COLUMBIA LIBRARIES

A BRIEF FOR

THE HONORABLE GEORGE ABBOTT

MINISTER OF COMMUNITY, ABORIGINAL AND WOMEN'S SERVICES

9:30 a.m. Thursday, January 31, 2002

KEY ISSUES

THE PROVINCIAL ROLE IN ENSURING QUALITY LIBRARY SERVICES IN COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT BC

1. Provincial Funding of Public Libraries

We want to express our appreciation for your support of the core per capita grant funding for BC Public Libraries evident in the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services "Service Plan Summary for 2002-2005".

We are grateful that the grants to Public Libraries and the funding for the important Public Library Services Branch is maintained at current levels within the envelopes of Local Government Transfers at a constant figure of \$130 million until 2004/2005.

We appreciate that commitment on your part in the context of serious budget cuts being made through both the Core Review process and the cuts necessary to produce a balanced budget by 2004.

Nonetheless we want to remind you that in the longer-term, the 2005/2006 budget, there is an urgency about raising the level of BC's per capita grant to the level of the other Western Provinces at an annual cost of \$8 million a year. It is presently at half the level of the other Provinces and has not been increased since 1991.

2. The Importance of Provincial Legislation in Establishing the Values which govern the provision of Library Services in BC

We should like to affirm the continued importance of Provincial legislation in regard to Library Services.

1] In particular we should like to stress the importance of **universal free access to public libraries**. Since the initiatives of the Carnegie Foundation in establishing free public libraries in many centers of the Province, free access has been critical for both public education and equality of opportunity for the less privileged and educated members of our society.

2] The tradition of **intellectual freedom** is an essential part of the role that libraries play in a democratic civil society. There is no censorship of the information resources which the public can access, and there is no censorship of the groups who are able to hold meetings in rooms provided by public libraries. This ensures the right to freedom of expression for our citizens.

3] The **present system of Library Board Governance** provides an efficient and responsible way of administering our public library system. It protects Provincial and Municipal politicians from responsibility for dealing with disputes about the contents of the libraries' print and electronic materials, and ensures a large contribution of time, experience, and skill to the governance of our libraries by a wide spectrum of community volunteers working with Municipal appointees.

4] There are **ways of integrating services which can only be done at the Provincial level**. Examples of this are the Inter-Library Loan System, the resolution of funding problems between Municipal Libraries and their surrounding Regional Districts, and the expansion of Interlink connectivity.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR LIBRARY SERVICES THROUGHOUT BRITISH COLUMBIA

We welcomed the Premier's initiative stated in his letter of June 29, 2001 that one of the objectives of your Ministry was to "Examine the feasibility of a strategic plan for library services throughout British Columbia."

We should like to express the desire of the Library community in BC, represented by the BC Library Association, the BC Library Trustees Association, and the Association of BC Public Library Directors, to partner with the Government in this important and critical initiative.

It is exciting that the Provincial Government is committed to the development of a new vision for library services in the Province.

You are encouraging us to think beyond the present day and look at the long term. We appreciate that invitation and want to respond to it with enthusiasm. We believe it is urgent that such a review be undertaken.

The Library Community in the Province would appreciate a sense of what such a strategic plan will entail, what sort of timeline you envisage for it, what sort of process, and what part we can play in its development?

We are eager to participate and think it important that the plan reflect the priorities of library users throughout the Province

LIBRARIES AS INTERNET PUBLIC ACCESS SITES

Libraries serve as “**Community Access Terminals**” and their librarians are skilled information professionals giving substantial time to training people in the use of Internet sites for access to information and for interaction with the delivery of Government Services.

The Gates Foundation, The Federal Government, and the Provincial Government have invested over \$40 million in equipping libraries in BC with internet access and computer equipment.

Libraries are usually open during evening and week-end hours, the key times for public access. Most other community facilities such as Schools and Government Offices are not open at those times. In Victoria 88 terminals were in use 86% of the hours the libraries were open in 2001.

In smaller communities there are no alternatives to the public library as “the community access terminal”. In small rural communities like McBride the

local public library plays a very important role in the health and vitality of the community.

Libraries are of the greatest importance to those in our communities least well equipped educationally and financially to use interactive Internet information services. Libraries address “the digital divide” in the demographic where it counts. The “bridging of the digital divide” is simply the latest expression of what libraries have been doing since their inception - making sure that knowledge and the tools to find it are available to everyone regardless of status or income.

BC Libraries already provide some rich and unique resources for achieving the three stated objectives of the Premier’s Technology Council:

- 1] Remove barriers that keep many British Columbians from participating in the knowledge-based economy and from accessing the educational, social, and cultural benefits delivered through broadband networks.
- 2] Identify areas where technology can make government more efficient and improve the delivery of government services throughout the province, including education and health care.
- 3] Ensure the growth and development of a vibrant, globally-competitive technology industry in British Columbia.

We look forward to working closely with the Premier’s Technology Council as it moves to enhance the quality and quantity of “Community Access Terminals”. We have provided our input to the Council as it is engaged in its “next 90 days consultative process”, through the BC Library Association.

Kindly see the attachment:
Bridging the Digital Divide
a presentation to the
Premier’s Technology Council
by the British Columbia Library Association
January 23, 2002

THE COMMUNITY CHARTER LEGISLATION

How do you see the Community Charter unfolding?

What will be its principal elements?

What will its implications be for the governance and funding of public libraries, if any?

We understand that the present draft does not make references to either Regional Districts or Public Libraries.

LIBRARIES AS ENGINES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Employment

Through partnerships with Human Resources Development Canada and with the Private Sector, libraries are committed to training people in the development of Job-Search skills, and in the provision of access to the required Employment Databases.

Business Development

Libraries offer Information Research training and access to Government and international Databases which enable entrepreneurs to investigate business opportunities and participate in the global economy.

* * * * *

Thank you very much for giving us your valuable time in such a demanding Ministry.

Respectfully submitted:

Blair Qualey,
President,
BC Library Trustees Association

Carol Elder,
President,
BC Library Association

John Barton
Vice-President, Advocacy
BC Library Trustees Association

**BC LIBRARIES BRIEF FOR HON. GEORGE ABBOTT
Jan 31, 2002**