

June 16, 2008

Dear Laurey and Leanne,

We at the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries understand that you will be meeting with staff of the Ministry of Culture today to develop criteria for allocating the \$15 million that your agencies were recently granted to “support public libraries to bridge the digital divide and provide all Ontarians with equitable access to digital information, community collections and services”. In this letter, we respectfully provide recommendations for allocating the grant, which we hope will be given serious consideration during your meeting.

Over the past few weeks, the Federation’s membership was surveyed to identify areas where individual library boards would benefit most from this new funding. Although we have been told informally that your agencies hope to consult with several stakeholder groups on allocation criteria this summer, the Federation has yet to receive an official invitation for input, or confirmation of the consultation timetable. Therefore, we felt it was important to provide our members’ recommendations now, while the setting of criteria is still in the early stages. In addition to this letter, we look forward to ongoing dialogue with you during the coming months as your agencies further refine the criteria for allocating the funds.

Responses to the Federation’s survey included a wide range of suggestions that reflect the diversity of our membership. However, our members’ feedback seemed to converge on the following general parameters for the use of the funds:

- Recognition that “no one size fits all”.
- Need to allocate some funds to every board and that local boards should determine how funds are spent, as much as possible.
- Recognition that small, remote libraries usually have the largest distance to go in bridging the digital divide.
- Importance of spending the funds strategically in order to better position libraries for the future.
- Importance of allocating a portion toward provincial initiatives such as marketing campaigns or research studies.
- Importance of keeping the allocation process simple in order to minimize the overhead costs for administering the funds.
- Focus on projects that only require one-time costs, given concerns over sustainability.
- Our members’ strong preference for increasing the annual operating grants to libraries rather than receiving one-time grants.

The last point deserves further discussion. Reliance on intermittent, variable one-time funding does not facilitate good program planning or budgeting. Many of the service level improvements that are demanded of public libraries require sustainable revenues to support ongoing operating costs. The inadequacy of ongoing funding to public libraries

has been worsening since 1997 when the provincial operating grant was cut by approximately 40%.

Consistent with the above, the Federation is recommending the funds be distributed as follows:

- 78% (\$11,700,000) to local boards on a per capita basis with minimums and maximums that benefit small boards in remote communities and recognize the inherent economies of scale already available to larger boards in urban centres. Within general parameters, local boards should be given discretion on how their individual allocations are spent.
- 10% (\$1,500,000) to SOLS and OLS-N to enhance their province-wide programs and shared services that support the needs of all public libraries across Ontario.
- 5% (750,000) to Ontario Library Association (OLA) to enhance their province-wide programs that benefit public library boards such as governance training for trustees.
- 5% (\$750,000) to the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) to commission priority marketing and research studies as identified by their members.
- 2% (\$300,000) to SOLS and OLS-N to administer the allocation of the funds and ensure spending is consistent with established criteria. This limit on fund administration costs would ensure that end users benefit as much as possible.

Below are the kinds of projects that local boards want to direct their allocated funding toward. Because there is no time restriction for spending against the \$15 million grant, certain boards might be able to secure other sponsors before their funding allocation is depleted. Therefore, we include some projects that would typically require sustainable funding.

#### Bridging the Digital Divide

- Connectivity for high-speed internet connections
- Implementation of wireless networks in libraries
- Discovery Stations, i.e. children's (early literacy) computer stations with preloaded programs
- Public access laptops, enabling patrons to be in areas where their children are, etc.
- Upgrades to aging CAP terminals
- Computer hardware peripherals, e.g. printers, scanners, new computers for public use
- Hiring of technical staff for training the public
- Access to temporary staff to assist with upgrading circulation/cataloguing systems

#### Access to Digital Information

- Subscription to "Canadian Directory to Foundations and Corporations"
- Access to "Overdrive Books" or similar source for downloadable audio books
- Subscription to "Ancestry.com" or "Ancestry.ca"

- Subscription to Globe and Mail or Toronto Star archives

#### Community Collections

- Healthy Families collection
- Family Literacy collection – designed to break the intergenerational cycle of low literacy.
- Adult Literacy – Rotating Book Blocks
- First Nations – Rotating Book Blocks

#### Services to the Local Community

- Hiring of project specific staff to develop and implement library programs such as Homework Clubs and Peer Tutor Circles (including promotional material, support kits and training for tutors and homework helpers)
- Software for the purpose of digitizing local historical information
- Library furniture, signage
- Updates/enrichment to Kids and Teen areas
- Retaining part-time IT professionals to troubleshoot operating systems
- Accessibility stations for disabled persons
- Literacy and reading promotion
- Newcomer support materials

Similarly, we list below the kinds of marketing and research projects that the Federation could undertake.

#### Marketing/Promotion:

- Province-wide campaign to promote libraries, better define the range of services offered and increase utilization
- Media campaign targeting students to alert them of the digital services available at their public library.

#### Research and Development:

- Undertaking research studies that focus on the library's contribution to economic development and transition to a knowledge economy (similar to ones done recently in Florida and Wisconsin)
- Developing potential funding models that could replace the provincial grant in order to meet the needs of boards of all types (eg. Those in shrinking, smaller and remote communities vs. growing, large urban centers communities)
- Developing assessment tools for children's preschool library programmes to better gauge and promote the benefits of programmes provided.
- Studying trends in public library service, products and use, i.e update of Market Probe study
- Studying the feasibility of a province-wide library card

Finally, the following other projects could be considered as partnership opportunities among SOLS, OLS-N, OLA and FOPL for the overall benefit of the sector.

- Increased allocations to SOLS courier services resulting in reduced costs to individual libraries.
- Funding for libraries to hire interns, both Librarians or Library Technicians
- New arrangements with Canada Post re: postal costs on books
- Wrapping SOLS courier vehicles with messaging to promote Ontario's public libraries.

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries trusts that this letter will be useful during your deliberations with Ministry staff later today. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding our member survey and recommendations. We look forward to working with you to ensure the \$15 million is directed toward projects that maximize benefits for Ontario's public libraries.