

CANADIAN HERITAGE ROUNDTABLES WRITTEN POLICY SUBMISSION

Joint submission by the Ontario Library Association and Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
November 2020

About the Ontario Library Association:

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) is a professional association that includes 5,000 members who work in or with public, school, academic, health and special libraries. OLA members create networking and professional development opportunities designed to strengthen the library sector and to ultimately provide impactful and meaningful library services for Ontarians

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About the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries:

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) represents Ontario's 400 public library systems exceeding 1,000 branches in virtually every Ontario community. FOPL works with the membership on strengthening Ontario's public libraries through advocacy, research & development, and marketing.

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Proposal

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how much Canadians in all communities rely on local libraries in their daily lives – to work, to learn, to connect.

Canada’s libraries have worked tirelessly to meet the evolving and rapidly changing needs of the people they serve throughout the pandemic.

Priority Recommendations

In addition to supporting the recommendations of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB), we are seeking the Canadian government’s support for the following priority recommendations, which will ensure that libraries can continue to adapt and perform their critical role during the disruption of the pandemic and beyond.

1- Align with provincial efforts to ensure that modern broadband connectivity is available in more Canadian public library branches

The pandemic has demonstrated the acute need in many communities for broadband and digital infrastructure. Due to COVID-19, half of Canadians currently employed say they are now working from home. Public libraries are an essential access-point for broadband internet and computers, providing Wi-Fi connectivity via hotspots lending, in common areas, or through bookmobiles. This is crucial for many rural and Northern communities where at-home connectivity is limited, and for millions of Canadians that cannot afford in-home internet services.

Many public library branches across Canada do not have high-speed broadband access or have outdated internet infrastructure that does not meet today’s needs or demand.

Supporting Canadian public libraries through improved broadband connectivity will help Canadians connect to the infrastructure they need for work, education, and life-long enrichment.

2 - Implement the Canadian Urban Library Council’ (CULC)’s recommendations to ensure access to e-content for Canada’s public libraries from multinational publishers

Public libraries have seen a significant increase in demand for e-resources, with 39% of public libraries reporting an increase in their spending on e-resources to meet growing demand, according to OLA’s April 2020 survey. However, public library access to digital content is limited due to unfair and restrictive pricing policies set by the “Big 5” e-book/e-audiobook publishers.

In its pre-budget submission to the House of Commons Finance Committee, CULC/CBUC called on the government of Canada to ensure access to e-content for Canada's public libraries from multinational publishers. We support this recommendation, and ask that the federal government ensures that the problems libraries are facing in accessing e-content are solved, so that Canada's public libraries can meet the growing demand for digital publications.

3 - Maintain the Canada Post Library Book Rate; Strengthen and Support Canada's publishing sector.

Through Inter-Library Loan, public libraries can provide Canadians with the physical books and materials they need, without cost or geographic barriers. Maintaining the Canada Post Library Book Rate is critical to providing this highly-valued program, especially as many public library budgets are under pressure due to COVID-19.

Echoing the recommendations of the Association of Canadian Publishers, OLA and FOPL also propose that the government extend this postage rate to Canadian booksellers.

By extending the library book rate to Canadian booksellers, we increase access at the public library to Canadian published books, and support of children's reading programs accessed by schools and public libraries¹.

4 - Strategy to support libraries serving Official Language Minority Communities (OLCMs)

Libraries are uniquely positioned to enhance the vitality of French and English minority communities and to promote the French and English languages in Canadian society. However, public libraries serving official language minority communities across Canada face unique challenges in meeting the needs of these communities (e.g. decisions to cut French language collections or to cancel the purchase of Canadian publishers French language resources).

In recent years, provinces and territories have adopted new legislation or policies to support the delivery of provincial, territorial and municipal services in the minority official language. A national strategy for public libraries serving OLMCs can help ensure that they meet the needs of their communities.

5 - Support nonprofits and associations that strengthen the library and archival sectors

Library and archival nonprofit and associations are in desperate need of support. Associations and nonprofits strengthen and build the capacity of the library and archival sectors. As a non-profit library association with more than 5,000 members, we have been able to access some of the federal supports available and urgently need access to the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS). OLA endorses the recommendation of Imagine Canada for the creation of a Sector Resilience Grant Program to support organizations as they adapt and innovate.

Alignment with recovery framework: Fostering innovation, resilience, and sustainability

Public libraries contribute to increasing demand for Canadian Art, Productions and Cultural Products.

Broadband Connectivity

Public libraries remain an essential access point for internet connectivity for Canadians. Even when their doors were closed, public libraries continued to provide Wi-Fi connectivity for residents via hotspots lending, in parking lots or through bookmobiles.

Public libraries provide critical support for fair access to modern, digital resources including e-books and author programming for people across Canada.

Public libraries are an important market for the Canadian publishing sector. Since March 2020, public libraries across Canada have experienced a significant demand for e-resources and online library programming. 39% of public libraries increased purchases of e-content. Public libraries are also delivering online programs, including virtual storytimes (at 53% of public libraries), book clubs (27%) and author talks (8%).

A national strategy to support the purchase of and access to library materials, programs and services in both official languages for official language minority communities.

A national strategy is required to support purchase and access to library materials, programs and services that meets the needs of OLMCs will build the library sector capacity to enhance the vitality of OLMCs and to promote a bilingual Canada while encouraging innovation and excellence. It will also increase the demand for Canadian cultural products and seek to address the inequities across regions and between urban and rural/remote/northern communities.

ⁱ The Ontario Library Association has submitted a separate proposal to Canadian Heritage regarding support and expansion of the Forest of Reading Program