Alberta Municipal Affairs

Positioning Alberta Libraries for the 21st Century

January 19, 2009

C O N T E N T S

Transmittal letter

Dear Minister Danyluk:

It has been a pleasure and an honour for the MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta to consult with Albertans on ways to better support public libraries.

Through our consultations, we've encountered many Albertans who are passionate and committed to quality library service in their communities. Their dedication is both remarkable and infectious. We hope we've captured their passion in this report.

It is our opinion that measured and coordinated action by the Government of Alberta in each of the areas outlined in this report will create a solid framework for world-class public library service in Alberta well into the 21st century.

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this very exciting and important project.

Jeff Johnson, MLA
Chair

Fred Horne, MLA
Member

Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA
Member

The MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta

Executive Summary

"We want seamless access to the services and resources of all publicly funded libraries for all Albertans."

—Library stakeholder

The Honourable Ray Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, commissioned an MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in August 2008, appointing Jeff Johnson, MLA for Athabasca Redwater, as Chair, and Fred Horne, MLA for Edmonton Rutherford, and Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA for Calgary Mackay, as members.

The MLA Committee was asked to recommend specific actions in which the Government of Alberta can support libraries by:

- building on the established base of library service
- promoting collaboration and innovation
- capitalizing on technology

The MLA Committee attended 11 consultation sessions throughout Alberta during September and October 2008. Hundreds of library stakeholders—library professionals, staff and trustees, municipal leaders, educators, volunteers, government officials, MLAs and government ministers—shared their ideas and opinions on how the province can best support libraries.

Clearly, Alberta has benefited from the deep dedication of these people to the library system. Their sense of ownership in the system has inspired them to nurture their local libraries, tailoring services to community needs.

Alberta's library system is an excellent example of shared governance, a tremendous success story, but not without its challenges. While autonomy has created strong local libraries and library boards, the flip-side is the evolution of "silos," inadvertently restricting access to certain services, duplicating others, and increasing costs. The challenge for the MLA Committee is to develop recommendations that dismantle those silos and increase access to libraries without taking away their autonomy.

Alberta has all the building blocks in place to create one of the best library systems in the world. The Alberta government has supported The Alberta Library and the regional library systems. It has invested in technology like the SuperNet, the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network, and the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library. Stakeholders told us the government must provide more leadership to further integrate these systems.

Stakeholders also asked the province to continue to partner with municipalities to ensure the library's role is not eroded by increasing costs and service pressures. They asked government to develop a strategic coordinated approach to designing the future of our library system. They want the province to contribute, not as owners, but as stronger partners in the library system.

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The MLA Committee makes the following recommendations to the Government of Alberta:

Create an overarching library policy

1. Create an integrated library policy to guide decision-making and strategic planning and investments. The policy must support a vision of seamless access to publicly funded library services for all Albertans.

Support a strong province-wide public library service

2. As soon as fiscally possible, increase provincial funding to 2009 levels (population and current dollar value) for municipal library boards and regional library systems.

3. Tie library funding to conditions to be established by the Alberta Public Library Services Branch.

4. Acknowledge the significant role municipalities play in funding Alberta's libraries, and encourage municipalities, at a minimum, to maintain current levels of funding.

5. Provide a stronger base level of funding to small municipal libraries (under 3000 people) that are struggling to meet minimum levels of service under current funding arrangements.

6. Take a broader leadership role in policy development, implementation, coordination, and measurement through the Alberta Public Library Services Branch.

7. Enhance the role of The Alberta Library as an umbrella organization that works closely with publicly funded libraries, regional library systems, and the Government of Alberta.

8. Enhance the role of regional library systems to increase service and support to the municipal libraries in their regions.

Promote collaboration and innovation

9. Establish a standing committee of assistant deputy ministers to coordinate policies and programs that impact publicly funded libraries. The committee should also identify programs that are delivered or could be delivered by public libraries (in whole or in part) and coordinate their delivery.

10. Designate public libraries that house innovative programs, services or technologies as centres of excellence. This could include academic and school libraries. Package and share their knowledge and expertise with other public libraries.

11. Aggressively exploit opportunities for public libraries and schools to work together on student supports, co-location, staffing, literacy, and sharing of resources, including videoconferencing.

12. Encourage municipal libraries to formalize meetings with their local governments, local provincial government offices, not-for-profit organizations, post-secondary institutions, schools and community groups. This would ensure library programs and services are meeting the needs of the community and providing public information, without duplicating services.

13. Hold formal meetings with the federal government and the 47 First Nations and 8 Métis settlements in Alberta with the objective of including them within the vision of seamless access to publicly funded library services for all Albertans.

Capitalize on technology

14. Develop a province-wide technology plan to create a standardized, seamless network of library services, including a single library card available to all Albertans. This should be led by the Alberta Public Library Services Branch and supported by The Alberta Library.

15. Plan, develop and implement videoconferencing services with other public organizations (Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, school boards and Service Alberta) to ensure libraries have access to these services without duplication of taxpayer investment.

16. Task The Alberta Library to explore opportunities to implement or pilot emerging technologies in public libraries.

17. Negotiate and purchase licenses for electronic databases and products on a provincial basis to give all Albertans access to these resources.

18. Ensure all libraries have wireless high-speed Internet access.

—Slave Lake Municipal Library, Slave Lake

Background: Alberta's public library system

"Libraries touched my kids and I from the time they were two, and they still touch me today."

—Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Alberta Culture and Community Spirit

Over the years communities have changed and library users have changed, but the way the province supports libraries has changed very little.

It is not that the current library system is in disarray—far from it. Alberta's public library system enjoys strong support. In 2006, Albertans made 23.3 million virtual visits to libraries and 17 million actual visits. Membership in Alberta's public libraries has increased by 30 percent since 1995.

Public libraries have also benefited from significant provincial investment. In addition to per capita grants, the Alberta government provided one-time grants to regional and municipal library boards of over $20 million in 2006 and 2007. Alberta's investment of $193 million in the SuperNet has the province poised to make great strides in library service. Service Alberta also provides a large portion of today's library courier service for inter-library loan.

Even so, libraries face pressures, similar to those faced by other sectors in Alberta: increased service demands due to growth in Alberta's population, economy and technological capability. At the same time, every sector is competing to maintain its workforce.

Demographic changes now require libraries to provide specialized services to Aboriginals, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, immigrants and new Canadians, while still providing day-to-day support to all Albertans. And while the one-time financial support provided by the Government of Alberta is significant, libraries need an increase in per capita funding to meet current and future challenges.

To address the pressures facing libraries and to better plan for the future, the Honourable Ray Danyluk, Minister of Municipal Affairs, created the MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta.

This document represents the findings and recommendations of the MLA Committee to the Minister of Municipal Affairs arising from the consultation process.

A fundamental institution

"Libraries are an underutilized treasure."

—Heather Klimchuk, Minister of Service Alberta

Libraries are a community touchstone, whether they function as large urban facilities with professional staff working extended hours or as one-room rural services operating only a few hours a week, often with volunteer staff.

Whether you are a child, a single-parent, a senior or an entrepreneur developing a new idea, you can visit a library, be welcomed, and get the support you need to participate in the life of your community.

—File photo

An immigrant living in Brooks, Alberta, can access world newspapers and multilingual e-books at the library, get help applying for Canadian citizenship and take a course in tax preparation for new Canadians. He or she can also get direction on writing a resume and finding a job, and attend a story time for families who use English as a second language.

Grade two and three students in Calgary having difficulty learning to read can visit the public library, and a police officer will become the child's reading mentor through the program "It's a crime not to read."

The developmentally disabled in Red Deer can visit the library and participate in a program called Artsparks. The program encourages them to actively plan and implement arts programming in the library setting. During the library's summer film program, participants helped write the script, cast the actors and even act on screen.

Aboriginal peoples can enjoy Aboriginal Family Storytime at the Sprucewood Branch of the Edmonton Library. The program is presented by the library and the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society.

But libraries are more than a social service; they represent society's investment in its people, an industry and institution that creates human wealth and knowledge. As we move to a more knowledge-based economy, Alberta's libraries—both traditional and digital—will become even more critical to the sustainability of our economy and our way of life.

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Types of libraries

Alberta's **public library** system consists of public (municipal) libraries, regional library systems, academic libraries, government libraries, school libraries, and the The Alberta Library (the chart in Appendix A provides a visual overview of the system). All of these libraries are primarily funded by the taxpaying Albertan, yet access to the information they house is not always available to all Albertans.

Alberta's public libraries, under the legislative jurisdiction of Municipal Affairs, consist of 310 municipal libraries, administered and governed by 227 municipal library boards. The strength of Alberta's public library system, at its core, lies in its autonomy. Nurtured by a sense of local ownership and initiative, libraries tailor programs and services to the needs of individual communities.

At the regional level, there are seven **regional library systems** (see Appendix C). These valuable autonomous boards cooperate through provincial networks and resource-sharing agreements. By pooling their resources, member libraries have increased efficiencies and achieved economies of scale. They have improved centralized services like ordering and cataloguing, and can access skills not available at the local level. Regional library systems also provide staff training, continuing education, and facilitate inter-library loans. This reduces duplication of efforts in Alberta's libraries. Twenty-four communities have opted to operate outside the regional system including Edmonton and Calgary, whose larger library communities are self-sufficient. Public libraries use one of two library operating systems to deliver their programs, with different versions used by different libraries.

"Membership in the regional library system continues to be one of our greatest assets. Our patrons love the inter-library loans service, as does our staff."

—Peace River Municipal Library

The Government of Alberta provides between 15 to 20 percent of per capita library funding for public libraries and regional library systems. Municipal library boards receive provincial operating grants of $4.29 per capita, and regional library system boards receive provincial operating grants of $3.22 per capita at 2005 population figures. Library initiatives and capital investments are also supported by Alberta Culture and Community Spirit through the Lottery Board. Municipal governments provide the remainder, with approximately five percent raised from library card fees and late fines. The government also provided one-time library funding to regional and municipal library boards of $20 million in 2006 and 2007.

The province has contributed significantly to libraries through its investment of $193 million in the SuperNet, including $1.48 million annually to connect public libraries. As well, it contributes $1.75 million per year to support The Alberta Library and the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network. Service Alberta provides courier services to the seven regional library systems, as well as communities throughout the province, at a cost of almost $500,000 a year.

The larger publicly funded library sector includes government and academic libraries. **Academic libraries**, under the jurisdiction of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, consist of all college and university libraries with research collections. Supporting students and faculty, these academic libraries also give their stakeholders access to the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library.

Government libraries, under the jurisdiction of Service Alberta, maintain eight separate collections supporting individual government departments. They include the Legislature Library, used mainly by MLAs and researchers. Government libraries are open to the public, but only for on-site use. Digital information is inaccessible. Materials can be removed, but only with a card from The Alberta Library.

The Alberta Library (TAL) was formed in 1997 as a virtual library to connect Alberta's physical and digital libraries and to promote voluntary collaboration in the sector. An incorporated, not-for-profit company governed by a board of directors, The Alberta Library has 290 members that include public libraries, regional library systems, government libraries and academic libraries including Aboriginal college libraries.

The Alberta Library administers the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network, which coordinates the development and promotion of electronic technology in Alberta libraries, the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library, and the Online Reference Centre, which provides a unique collection of online reference sources in French and English. It also provides a number of services, such as negotiating group pricing for online resources and licensing electronic databases for specific user groups, but not for the entire province. The Alberta Library receives $8.6 million in government funding and generates additional revenue through membership and administrative fees.

The library sector also includes **school libraries,** under the jurisdiction of Alberta Education. They support student learning in public, private, and charter schools. Alberta has many **private libraries** owned and operated by organizations, companies, corporations and individuals.

Clearly, Alberta has a wealth of library resources that exist because of the investment of the province, municipalities and stakeholders. However, public access can be limited by library mandate. The Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library is an example of a cutting-edge digital resource made available to only a select group—post-secondary students, faculty, and researchers—about seven percent of all Albertans.

The digital library provides 35 post-secondary institutions in Alberta with access to commercially licensed digital resources and newly created collections of unique digitized content. The digital library currently contains over 4.5 million licensed items, including academic journals, encyclopaedias, magazine and newspaper articles, literary criticisms and video clips. A resource this rich should and could easily be made available to every Albertan online or through the public library, but it is not.

Another valuable database is LearnAlberta.ca which is available only to students, parents and teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12. It contains a variety of learning resources designed to optimize student success, but is largely inaccessible after Grade 12. This resource should be made available to every Albertan online or at least available at the public library, but it is not.

In contrast, Tell Me More, a language software program, is available through The Alberta Library to every Albertan with a library card. It can be accessed at a public library or over the Internet. The software covers all areas of language learning—enabling libraries to better support Alberta's culturally diverse communities.

Marian Enow was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, and came to Canada in the late 1980s:

"I had little knowledge of English when I arrived, and even though I took ESL classes, practicing was hard. This program (Tell Me More) would have helped me with comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary and practice time. Learning English would have been less stressful and less intimidating for me, so I'm happy that we are able to offer the program to benefit others."

—Marian Enow

To fully realize the potential of Alberta's publicly funded libraries, we must create a seamless network of library services and information for all Albertans.

The provincial government's role

In addition to funding libraries, the role of the Government of Alberta is to:

• respect the diversity, autonomy and independence of libraries and their communities
• support equitable access to public library service for all stakeholders
• maintain viable public library governance structures
• support municipal and regional library boards
• establish a province-wide network for communications and sharing of library resources between and among libraries, and between libraries and the Government of Alberta
• encourage greater collaboration between library boards

—Strathcona Public Library 1913, Edmonton

How decisions are made

The *Libraries Act* regulates public library services in Alberta. Separate policy pieces have been developed by the various library stakeholders including The Alberta Library and the Alberta Public Library Services Branch. Stakeholders have asked for a well-articulated provincial policy to enhance the operations of Alberta's public libraries. There is a great opportunity to more strongly link libraries to other areas of government policy and strategic planning—economic, health, social and cultural—and benefit from those linkages.

Where we want to be

"Every Albertan is every library's user."

MLA Committee findings and stakeholder input

A complete summary of stakeholder input is included in Appendix B.

Overall, stakeholders described a future with seamless access to the services and resources of all publicly funded libraries in Alberta. We believe this access can be achieved by enhancing technology and collaboration, requiring limited investment and minor adjustments to our existing library system.

Funding

The province's library operating grant per capita has not changed since 1992 and is based on 2005 population figures. Stakeholders acknowledge that one-time government funding has helped, as has SuperNet service. However, libraries need an increase in per capita funding to enable them to plan ahead and meet the changing service needs of Albertans.

"Library funding must be self-contained, not in competition with other services."

Leadership

Stakeholders desire an overarching policy to guide library service and delivery, and encourage government to provide more leadership and coordination of services to all libraries, not only public libraries. A central, provincial policy would greatly enhance the operation of Alberta's public libraries.

Stakeholders want more clarity on the roles of library stakeholders, particularly The Alberta Library and the regional library systems. Roles need to be clearly defined and articulated.

Collaboration and innovation

Stakeholders applaud the current regional library systems as critical to the successful functioning of the public libraries. Still, they see an opportunity for sharing and systematic rollout of innovations in administration, program services, staffing and technology. They note that no one appears to have the province-wide mandate or leadership role, capacity or resources to make this happen.

A formal mechanism or policy to encourage more collaboration within government or between government and communities is needed. Government departments should examine existing infrastructure like public libraries when setting up or rolling out new programs or services like Community Adult Learning Councils, which provide instruction in a variety of areas including adult literacy and English as a second language, or when establishing new buildings, schools or school

libraries. Likewise, local library boards should leverage existing infrastructure to deliver public library programs and services.

"In 2007 we began our first full year of Adult Literacy Services, with ongoing funding (about $80,000 annually) from Alberta Advanced Education and Technology."
—Red Deer Public Library stakeholder

Technology

Stakeholders say libraries require a province-wide technology strategy that takes a coordinated, provincial approach to the licensing of electronic databases and products to ensure seamless access to database information for all Albertans. They suggest the strategy build on the province's investment in the SuperNet, and promote staff training and recruitment to deal with emerging technologies. The MLA Committee supports the development of a technology strategy that promotes more collaboration, standardization, and resource sharing.

Equitable service delivery

There are different levels of service offered by libraries across the province. This is often evident in the availability of computer resources, hours of operation, and availability of trained staff. All public libraries need to provide, at a minimum, a base level of service to Albertans.

More demand

There is an increasing demand for service by Aboriginals, senior citizens, the developmentally disabled, immigrants and new Canadians. As Albertans become better educated and computer literate, they are demanding more sophisticated information and access to "hot spots" or venues with wireless internet service.

"Many residents in nearby rural communities drive in on the weekend or evening to access our library's wireless Internet services, even though the library is closed to the public during that time. As an example, they will sit in their vehicles and do their banking on their laptop."
—Rural library stakeholder

"Our programs and collections are based on what people need and want. When we focus on outreach programming we are extending the front door of the library."
—Public library stakeholder

"Our library is being used for adult distant education and adult literacy programs."
—Czar Public Library stakeholder

"Irricana is unique in that we have no schools in a town of 1300 people. We have very limited space, but are still able to house four computer workstations for the students who come home on the bus from school and need to do research."
—Irricana and District Municipal Library stakeholder

Staffing

There is a shortage of specialized staff in Alberta's public libraries largely due to difficulty attracting young people to the profession. The 8R's Report of 2005 (University of Alberta) stated that almost one half of librarians in Canada are over the age of 50, and it predicted that 48 percent of librarians will retire by 2014.

Staff training and skill sets need to keep up with changing demands and expectations, particularly in the area of technology. Stakeholders suggest more in-house training in rural areas. As well, local and distance education programs need to provide more accessible and affordable library-science education programs.

Training for library board trustees is an ongoing need. Board trustees need easy access to training to help them fulfill their role.

Marketing, awareness and communications

The scope of services offered by libraries has changed immensely in recent years, yet many Albertans are unaware of the services available to them. Alberta's public libraries need to better market their services and let Albertans know the wealth of information, services and opportunities available at their local libraries.

—Banff Public Library, Banff

How we get there: recommendations

"Within a library can be found the seeds of a better tomorrow. If planted in the right fertile minds, these seeds, properly nurtured, can grow into ideas that will make the world of the future more just, more compassionate than the one we live in today."

—Lois Hole

Create an overarching library policy

1. Create an integrated library policy to guide decision-making and strategic planning and investments. The policy must support a vision of seamless access to publicly funded library services for all Albertans.

While there has been considerable discussion about better collaboration among and between libraries, government departments, and other stakeholders, and while there are many excellent examples of successful collaboration on specific initiatives at the community and regional levels, the MLA Committee observed differing levels of library service offered across the province.

We concluded that the lack of an overall policy to guide decision-making and resource allocation is the root of many of the challenges identified and indeed critical to building on our success in the future. Such a policy would clearly set out, among other elements:

- guiding principles with respect to issues such as access to library resources
- policy outcomes to be achieved through the provision of library services
- roles and responsibilities of stakeholders at all levels, including government departments involved in delivering publicly funded library services, as well as those involved in supplying programs and services delivered through libraries
- a governance model, and funding and accountability frameworks to support achievement of the outcomes
- structured mechanisms for collaboration involving revised and potentially new roles for government departments, The Alberta Library, the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network, regional library systems, and others

It is our belief that, once complete, the library policy will show that the collective pool of resources available to Albertans is both larger and richer than currently understood.   The opportunity to leverage and manage these resources as a single body of knowledge will enable libraries to support a much broader range of strategic objectives in areas as diverse as economic development and diversification, culture and health.

Support a strong province-wide public library service

2. As soon as fiscally possible, increase provincial funding to 2009 levels (population and current dollar value) for municipal library boards and regional library systems.

3. Tie library funding to conditions to be established by the Alberta Public Libraries Branch. Conditions should include:

- *participation in the plan that supports seamless access to library services*
- *support and implementation of agreed-upon minimum standards for library services, technology and workforce*
- *sharing of innovative programs and services with other libraries*
- *support of other province-wide initiatives that enhance library services for all Albertans including, but not limited to, upgrading of hardware and software technology and implementing wireless high-speed Internet for community access*

- *membership in a regional library system, excluding the major cities of Edmonton and Calgary*

4. Acknowledge the significant role municipalities play in funding Alberta's libraries and encourage municipalities, at a minimum, to maintain current levels of funding.

5. Provide a stronger base level of funding to small municipal libraries (under 3000 people) that are struggling to meet minimum levels of service under current funding arrangements.

Per capita funding should be increased as soon as possible. The MLA Committee believes funding should be tied to library participation in a more aligned, integrated system that achieves a basic level of service for all Albertans, such as minimum hours of operation and access to wireless high-speed Internet. As well, the regional library systems are a tremendous resource for member libraries, and this recommendation further encourages non-members to join.

6. The Government of Alberta, through the Alberta Public Library Services Branch, should take a broader leadership role in:

- *developing and implementing policy*
- *coordinating and collaborating with other departments that have programs and services that impact on or can be delivered through public libraries*
- *facilitating the planning, development and implementation of province-wide library initiatives*
- *developing performance and accountability measures for public libraries, implementing those measures, and ensuring adherence to agreed-upon province-wide standards*
- *reviewing the current number and make-up of Alberta's regional library systems and evaluating the feasibility of Edmonton and Calgary library boards joining or becoming an anchor of two of these systems*
- *developing a more comprehensive and more efficient distribution system for inter-library loan materials*

This recommendation responds to stakeholder input calling on the province to take a stronger leadership role in areas of policy and planning. It will better connect Alberta government departments with the library system. It will encourage departments, when they prepare their business plans, to think of the public library as a stakeholder, as well as a window to program information.

For example, Alberta Employment and Immigration could maximize the reach of its own programs by working with libraries and community organizations that support literacy programs for immigrants. Alberta Culture and Community Spirit could increase awareness of our province's culture and history by offering more programs like writers-in-residence and travelling art displays in our public libraries. Celebrations to mark the recently created Arts Day could be promoted and delivered, in part, through the library system.

7. Enhance the role of The Alberta Library as an umbrella organization that works closely with the publicly funded libraries, regional library systems, and the Government of Alberta. Under the leadership of the Alberta Public Library Services Branch, The Alberta Library should:

- *develop minimum province-wide standards and best practices for library services*
- *plan and implement a province-wide marketing plan aimed at increasing the awareness of library services to Albertans*
- *explore opportunities to implement or pilot new technologies and improve library services*

- *design, build and implement a province-wide technology plan that supports standardization, including wireless communications, and a single library system that will create seamless access to library services*
- *help implement a single library card that would permit Albertans to access library materials from all publicly funded libraries in Alberta*
- *plan and implement a library workforce strategy that includes attraction, retention and development of public library staff*

This recommendation builds on The Alberta Library's significant experience in creating library efficiencies and its already established relationships with all library stakeholders. The membership and structure of The Alberta Library may need to be adjusted to accommodate this recommendation.

8. Enhance the role of regional library systems to increase service and support to the municipal libraries in their regions. The focus of regional library systems should include:

- *working in partnership with The Alberta Library to plan and implement a common technology system for public libraries*
- *implementing province-wide library initiatives including staff training and development, sharing of best practices and awareness programs*
- *providing operational support, such as corporate services which could include accounting, payroll and IT support to small libraries. This would help to eliminate duplication, improve efficiency, and allow rural library boards to focus their efforts on delivery of library services*

The regional library systems will continue to implement provincial strategies; they will be the bridge between provincial initiatives and local libraries. Information technology infrastructure and systems should be managed on a provincial basis, with regional library systems providing customized operational support at the local level.

Promote collaboration and innovation

9. Establish a standing committee of assistant deputy ministers to coordinate policies and programs that impact publicly funded libraries. The committee should also identify programs that are delivered or could be delivered by public libraries (in whole or in part) and coordinate their delivery.

10. Designate public libraries that house innovative programs, services or technologies, as centres of excellence. This could include academic and school libraries. Package and share their knowledge and expertise with other public libraries.

Libraries have developed many innovative programs to support the needs of their users. This recommendation is not about building new physical structures, rather it supports sharing expertise to avoid duplication and to improve service to Albertans. For example, the library in Brooks could work with Alberta Employment and Immigration to be the centre of excellence for library programs supporting new Albertans.

11. Aggressively exploit opportunities for public libraries and schools to work together on student supports, co-location, staffing, literacy, and sharing of resources, including videoconferencing. This involves public school boards, municipalities, library boards, Alberta Education, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and Alberta Public Library Services Branch.

Fifty-seven public libraries are already successfully sharing facilities with school libraries in Alberta communities. However, in some communities, there is an abundance of libraries (i.e., a community of 2500 can have up to five libraries), all struggling for resources and all funded by

taxpaying Albertans. By better integrating and rationalizing services, libraries could share resources, research, staff training and expertise, and infrastructure, to better serve Albertans.

In some communities, public libraries are housed in school libraries. This has some notable efficiencies and opportunities for saving. It also has some challenges.

Dean Lindquist, Superintendant of Grande Yellowhead Regional School Division, sees a natural link between school libraries and public libraries. He highlights three examples in his school division where public libraries are successfully housed in schools—Grande Cache Community High School, Niton Central School and Grande Trunk High School:

"School libraries and public libraries have a lot of opportunities to share resources. It's about cost efficiencies and providing service. At the end of the day, by working together, long term costs are reduced and infrastructure costs are reduced, and library opportunities are enhanced for both students and the public. We end up with far superior library service."
                    —Dean Lindquist, Superintendant - Grande Yellowhead Regional School Division

Collaboration between public libraries and school libraries should be further explored and leveraged with Alberta Education and other key stakeholders. Ultimately, an enabling policy or 'tool kit' should be developed for public libraries housed in schools or libraries shared with schools.

*12. Encourage municipal libraries to formalize meetings with their local governments, local provincial government offices, not-for-profit organizations, post-secondary institutions, schools and community groups. This will ensure library programs and services are meeting the needs of the community and providing public information, without duplicating service*s.

Libraries are well connected to their citizens and are often the first place visited by new residents. They provide a good measure of the pulse of the community. At the same time, libraries need to be aware of other government services and local initiatives to make sure they are not duplicating programs offered by other agencies. For example, courses in English as a second language can be offered in libraries, post-secondary institutes, and through settlement agencies.

13. Alberta Public Library Services Branch, working through Alberta Aboriginal Relations, should hold formal meetings with the federal government and the 47 First Nations and 8 Métis settlements in Alberta with the objective of including them within the vision of seamless access to publicly funded library services for all Albertans.

Alberta's Aboriginal population is close to 250,000. About 90,000 make their home on reserves and settlements, which vary in size from a few hundred to 7500 inhabitants. We are advised that only one of these 55 communities actually has a public library; the rest have none.

If Alberta is to achieve its vision of seamless access to publicly funded library services for all Albertans, it must consider ways to increase library services to Aboriginal people living on reserves and settlements. Further, it must encourage greater Aboriginal programming within the larger library system.

Capitalize on technology

14. Led by the Alberta Public Library Services Branch and supported by The Alberta Library, develop a province-wide technology plan to create a standardized, seamless network of library services, including a single library card available to all Albertans.

The technology plan would build on the government's investments in the SuperNet, the Alberta Public Library Electronic Network, and existing technologies. It must clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

As part of the technology plan, the MLA Committee recommends Alberta move to a single operating system to maximize efficiencies. Currently, there are numerous versions and customizations of the two main operating systems being used.

15. Led by Alberta Public Library Services Branch and supported by The Alberta Library, plan, develop and implement videoconferencing services with other public organizations (Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, school boards and Service Alberta) to ensure libraries have access to these services without duplication of taxpayer investment.

16. Task The Alberta Library to explore opportunities to implement or pilot emerging technologies in public libraries.

17. To give all Albertans access to all electronic databases, negotiate and purchase licenses for electronic databases and products on a provincial basis.

The Alberta Library negotiates the licensing of electronic databases on behalf of its clients which include Alberta Education, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, public libraries and government libraries. It negotiates each license separately for select groups of stakeholders and does not negotiate province-wide licenses. To create a truly provincial network, and give all Albertans access to all database information, the Government of Alberta must promote a provincial approach to the licensing of technology. While providing better access to information and resources, provincial licensing will help breakdown silos and reduce duplication.

18. Ensure all libraries have high-speed Internet access.

Most Alberta libraries have access to high-speed Internet, through the SuperNet. However, 15 libraries still do not have the infrastructure necessary to deliver wireless high-speed Internet. The MLA Committee recommends the province invest in the necessary support and infrastructure to offer this basic service in the remaining Alberta libraries.

—Memorial Park Library, Calgary

Conclusion

This report contains an ambitious set of recommendations. We would be reluctant to bring them forward, if not for the enthusiastic support of library organizations, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders. We are convinced that by leveraging our investments in libraries and technology and by aligning and integrating services, Alberta can create a library network with seamless access to all library materials and services for all Albertans. In that network, access to the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library would be available to all Albertans. All libraries would share the same information technology. Programs, like those offered to new immigrants in Brooks, would be made available throughout Alberta. This won't happen overnight, but we can start today.

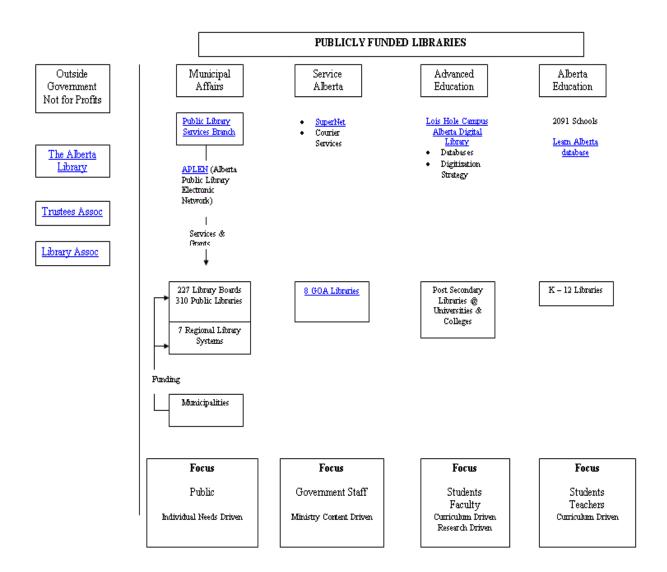The MLA Committee recommends the government take immediate action on the following items:

- Create an integrated policy for Alberta's publicly funded libraries.
- Increase funding to library boards and regional library systems.
- Ensure every library has access to high-speed Internet services.

- Purchase licenses for electronic databases and products for all Albertans.

—Lois Hole Library, Edmonton

Appendix A: Overview of Aberta's Library System

PUBLICLY FUNDED LIBRARIES			

Outside Government Not for Profits	Municipal Affairs	Service Alberta	Advanced Education	Alberta Education

	Public Library Services Branch	• SuperNet • Courier Services	Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library • Databases • Digitization Strategy	2091 Schools Learn Alberta database
The Alberta Library	APLEN (Alberta Public Library Electronic Network)			
Trustees Assoc				
Library Assoc	Services & Grants			

227 Library Boards 310 Public Libraries	8 GOA Libraries	Post Secondary Libraries @ Universities & Colleges	K – 12 Libraries
7 Regional Library Systems			

Funding

Municipalities

Focus Public Individual Needs Driven	**Focus** Government Staff Ministry Content Driven	**Focus** Students Faculty Curriculum Driven Research Driven	**Focus** Students Teachers Curriculum Driven

—Organizational chart, Alberta's library system

APPENDIX B: Comprehensive Summary of Stakeholder Input

Funding

Stakeholders said that provincial government funding for the library system must:

- adequately support salaries, hours of operation, utilities, replacement of computers, and training on a per capita basis
- support library innovation through staffing, pilot projects, and research
- continue with respect to the SuperNet to enhance bandwidth, replace edge devices, acquire new video edge devices, and support maintenance contracts
- build capacity for library organizations (TAL, ALTA, LAA) by providing for salaries, travel, training, and websites
- be sustained and self-contained so as not to be in competition with funding for other services. Such funding will support long-term planning
- alleviate the need for fundraising, as local libraries do not have the time nor the workforce to research government departments for programs or funding opportunities

Balancing local autonomy with province-wide initiatives

- Stakeholders said if the province pulled out of funding local libraries, there would be no leverage to keep libraries sharing or participating in province-wide initiatives.

Workforce training and development

Stakeholders said that workforce training and development should support:

- the stronger need for training in smaller communities
- "home-grown library staff" as an answer to the challenge of recruitment to rural locations. This means targeted training, customized training, and recognition for training. No one is going to take training if it results in low-paying jobs.
- internships for staff from small libraries to work in larger libraries
- online programs in general library operation and technology skills
- a distance-education program, as there are only five library schools in Canada, one of which is in Alberta
- scholarships or subsidies for public library staff, which are currently lacking. SAIT offers a library technician program but most of the graduates go to the private sector or special libraries
- the capability to deal with a different kind of client than in the past. Homeless people, for example, find libraries inviting, as do people with mental illness and troubled youth. Library workers would benefit from some social work training.
- networking opportunities for library trustees
- trustee training, which in the past has been supported by the PLSB and by funding of online training modules for trustees

Professional development

- There is a need for an online masters program from the University of Alberta for staff from mid-sized libraries who would like to further their careers but can't afford to leave their jobs. Targeted scholarships are required.

Technology

Stakeholders want a coordinated approach to technology, including:

- the purchase of provincial licenses for databases and electronic products. This would facilitate seamless access for stakeholders from wherever they access the resources (home—rural or urban, work, school, public library, university or college). It would also save costs.
- provision of a centralized Library Operating System to streamline access. (There were many conflicting ideas on this solution. Careful study is required before decisions are made.)
- provision of a single platform upon which all can collaborate and share
- enhanced library services from new electronic products and new formats, such as talking books and e-books, courses online, author readings, language training, etc.
- a strategy to keep library technology current or evergreen

Stakeholders also want:

- increased allocation of SuperNet bandwidth to address new applications like video services
- strategies to alleviate the cost of reconnecting the SuperNet when libraries move
- replacement of SuperNet equipment, such as edge devices
- purchase of equipment to facilitate videoconferencing/program delivery
- accommodation of wireless access, now the standard, for in-library laptop users as well as truckers and "parking lot" users
- enhancement of TAL Online, as this searching technology is now six years old and in need of updating or replacement
- more training for library staff in the basics of the Internet and accessing specialized databases
- more technicians

Library programs and services

Libraries are supported by a wide range of community assessments, operational plans, and community partnerships. In 2006 they provided 55,000 programs serving 1.2 million stakeholders. Ratings for service satisfaction are high, locally and nationally. When considering how to support Alberta's libraries, the provincial government should be aware that:

- Programs are run both directly by libraries and in partnership with community organizations.
- Immigrants go to the library for advice, services, and specialized resources.
- The library is an important public space in a society where public spaces are disappearing; it serves as a community focal point.
- Libraries are key resource centres for home schoolers.
- Tutoring is a popular service and use of the public library.

Library collaboration

A strong regional system is critical to the functioning of Alberta's libraries. Local, regional, provincial libraries and library systems are collaborating well, but more could be done, particularly across government. Stakeholders said the provincial government should consider:

- developing a mechanism to facilitate collaboration within government and to provide incentives for departments to look beyond the traditional silos. Departments should consider existing community infrastructure when setting up "new" initiatives. "No one is telling government departments to collaborate with libraries."
- using public libraries as outlets for medical information and health education.
- digitizing provincial archives materials and then linking public libraries into the distribution and possible collection of information. A provincial digitization strategy is needed, one that will develop content for use on SuperNet.
- communicating other opportunities of support from other government departments. Local libraries do not have the time nor the workforce to research government departments for programs or funding opportunities.

Library innovation

Innovative approaches in administration, program services, staffing or technology have not been adopted across the province because there is no funding or staffing assigned, and no one has the leadership mandate or responsibility to make it happen. Stakeholders said the provincial government could support innovation in the library system by:

- creating centres of excellence in specified areas such as administration, staffing, technology and new programs that support Aboriginals, seniors, the disabled, immigrants, multi-culturalism, community history and preschool literacy. The centres could maximize development and systematically extend innovations to all corners of the province through appropriate repackaging to meet local needs.
- supporting more user-created content—family histories, community histories, electronic war memorials, etc.
- providing sustained funding for innovative programs. Otherwise programs end as soon as funding runs out.

Interlibrary loan system

Through access to the Internet, SuperNet and TAL Online (a searching tool), member libraries can see everything that is available in public libraries, colleges, universities and government libraries, and they can request materials from other locations. The use of interlibrary loan has gone up exponentially. Stakeholders said the provincial government should consider that:

- Processing and delivery costs have escalated both for Service Alberta and library system couriers.

One Alberta library card

Everyone agreed that implementation of "one card" to facilitate the seamless system is a worthy goal, one that will likely take two to three years to implement.

Free cards/eliminate fees

Stakeholders said that free cards or the elimination of fees are:

- desirable, but certainly not the top priority for funding
- should be reconsidered after a period of stabilization in other areas of concern

Standards for public libraries

Most agreed that standards would be desirable for staffing, space, hours of operation, collection size, currency of collections and balance within collections:

- The government should define basic library service as we develop options for efficient and effective operation of small rural libraries.

Library governance and leadership

Clarity of roles is absolutely vital to maximize the potential of the library as a resource for stakeholders, including municipalities, library boards, library systems, GOA/Public Library Services Branch, other ministries, The Alberta Library, the Alberta LibraryTrustees Association, and the Library Association of Alberta. Stakeholders said the provincial government should improve governance by developing:

- a central/provincial policy framework that would greatly enhance the cohesiveness and operations of Alberta's public libraries
- a provincial body to coordinate (not necessarily govern) public library activity

Communications and awareness

Communication within regions is excellent; communication between regions is selective. Beyond that, communications are poor—between and among public libraries province-wide, between sectors within the broader library community, and between government departments on libraries and library issues. The provincial government could improve communications by:

- providing the Alberta Public Libraries Services Branch with staffing, funding and technical support to assume these responsibilities
- supporting an ongoing program to broaden the public's awareness of library developments and how libraries have changed. The program should be coordinated with library efforts to outreach to the community, using vans and any available locations. Key messages could include, "Government is proud of our libraries," and "People go to the library because of the people there."

Schools and public libraries

Consideration of public libraries' support for students was accompanied by discussions of school libraries versus school-housed public libraries. One school superintendent supported including public libraries in school facilities because it maximized the hours of use of expensive school facilities. Alberta has 57 public libraries housed within schools, including several in Calgary. A number of communities have co-located libraries and town administration buildings, and in Viking the library is located in the recreation complex along with selected other community services.

However, the conclusion that all libraries should be in schools was not accepted nor acceptable because the mandate of public libraries is cradle-to-grave service, with broad variation in the needs that are served—much broader than can be met in a school-housed library. As well, some psychological barriers of co-location are insurmountable.

Stakeholders thought the education system had devalued libraries and librarians for economic reasons. They thought it apparent that school-based budgeting, outside library access and personalities were key points in the success or failure of the school-housed public library.

Stakeholders thought that school-housed public libraries require standards of operation that:

- ensure that the needs of both parties are met
- serve as a mechanism of evaluation and enforcement
- guide principals and school boards with respect to their libraries
- are tied to funding

In stand-alone public libraries the question of how to best support students and parents needs to be addressed and assessed, particularly as libraries are key resource centres for home schoolers:

- Public libraries need access to LearnAlberta.ca resources, as not all students/parents are aware of the resources and how they are accessed.
- Hiring of teacher librarians by public libraries and/or library systems was also seen to be an option worth examining.

Studies, research and plans required

Stakeholders desire the following studies of library bodies:

- review of Regional Library Systems to determine where efficiencies can be found in administration, program support or purchasing strategies. Is seven the optimal number of regional systems?
- review of APLEN (Alberta Public Library Electronic Network) to determine how to more effectively link it back to the provincial government while still maintaining its flexibility and responsiveness
- review of ALTA (Alberta Library Trustees Association) to determine the most effective manner to enhance its capacity to serve all library trustees in the province
- review of the LAA (Library Association of Alberta) and ALTA to determine whether merging the two organizations would provide benefits or efficiencies
- review of strategies to better harmonize the technology needs and development of libraries with other initiatives across government—i.e., regular formal sharing sessions

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Stakeholders desire the following studies related to library service:

- creation of a vision and government strategic plan for library service
- study of the physical accessibility of libraries to determine the scope of work needed to create "barrier-free access" to all public libraries
- review of school-housed public libraries—the status and future of school-housed public libraries in Alberta
- research on the integration of plans of service locally, regionally, provincially
- research on the lending of toys, laptop computers
- research on the development of Career Centres, Community Learning Centres, Community Learning Councils, and Parent Link Centres
- an inventory/catalogue of electronic resources (speeches, histories, seminars, events) available in Alberta

Stakeholders also desire the following studies on staff development:

- an inventory of library-related distance learning courses available in Alberta
- research on the means of creating competitive library jobs in rural Alberta
- study of potential benefits programs for staff and workers
- study of incentives through the tax system—e.g., credits for volunteers

Measures of success

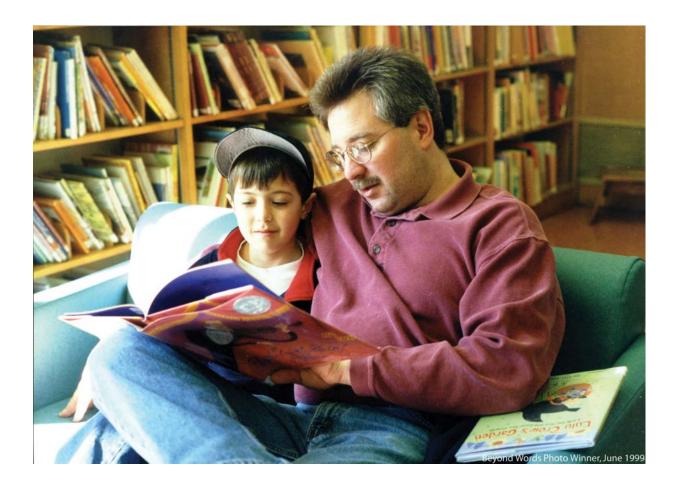Stakeholders thought development of library service would be indicated by:

- growth in the tradition of excellence in public library service in Alberta
- active fulfillment of public library stakeholders' roles in the delivery of library services
- awareness by stakeholders of the standards and levels of service available at public libraries
- acknowledgement and acceptance of public libraries as the centre of lifelong learning, literacy and numeracy in the community
- increased public library usage and an increased number of library cardholders
- increased foundational learning and literacy in Alberta, indicated by an informed, educated and engaged citizenry that possesses cultural awareness and uses more formal learning supports
- informed, trained and effective board trustees
- establishment of evidence-based data sets for determining outcomes
- funding for all public libraries in Alberta that is planned and predictable

Stakeholders thought that promotion of collaboration and innovation would be indicated by:

- all stakeholders having access to all public library resources and materials in the province
- improved efficiency in the delivery of all government resources and materials through the public library system
- increased availability of library-related training and development programs
- increased workforce skill levels and competencies
- funding responsibility for public library service balanced between funding stakeholders

Stakeholders thought that technology in support of Alberta's library system would be optimized by:

- a network infrastructure that is compatible, sustainable and effective
- improved access to networked library services and resources
- an increase in the number, size and quality of digitized databases in province
- growth in the number and usage of provincial databases available
- the planning, implementation and effective use of existing and new information technologies
- increased skill levels and competencies for technology use by staff

Beyond Words Photo Winner, June 1999

—File photo

Appendix C: Regional library systems

Peace Library System

Northern Lights Library System

Yellowhead Regional Library

Parkland Regional Library

Marigold Library System

Shortgrass Library System

Chinook Arch Regional Library System