



# North East Library Federation

## OUR VISION

**Strong libraries; strong communities**

### **2020 LIBRARY FEDERATION OPERATING GRANT REPORT**

#### ***Introduction***

Based on historic relationships that go back as early as the 1950s, the North East Library Federation was established in 2007 with the goal of helping libraries in the north east region of the province to work together to share resources and provide high quality programs and services. Its purpose, as originally conceived, was to promote and encourage the development, operation, and improvement of public library services in the North East of British Columbia. That purpose holds true today.

The federation serves seven public libraries providing services and programs for the approximately 50,000 residents across two regional districts - Northern Rockies and Peace River. Member libraries are Chetwynd Public Library, Fort Nelson Public Library, Fort St. John Public Library, Hudson's Hope Public Library, Taylor Public Library and Tumbler Ridge Public Library.

#### ***Strategic Goals – 2020 - 2022***

In 2019, the NELF Board and members of the Library Directors Advisory Group identified the following five key priority areas for the Strategic Plan – 2020 - 2022:

- ✓ Building Capacity
- ✓ Sharing Resources and Increasing Access
- ✓ Strengthening Relationships
- ✓ Increasing the Awareness of the Value of Public Libraries to the Communities They Serve
- ✓ Governance

The federation believe that its priorities align with the priorities identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter:

- ✓ Improved Regional and Local Shared Services delivery
- ✓ Improved Access to Professional Learning Opportunities for the Library Community
- ✓ Service Expansion Beyond Community Borders
- ✓ Support, Where Possible, the Provincial Strategic Direction

## ***2020 – Pivoting Due to the Pandemic***

The federation's workplan for 2020 was to focus on delivering specific actions tied to each of the federation's five priority areas. Then in mid-March, the Provincial Health Officer's directives in face of the growing Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a re-evaluation of the workplan for 2020. As I sit in my office, at the end of February 2021, drafting this report, we are still dealing with the pandemic, its repercussions, and its implications for the future.

The NELF Board, the Library Directors Advisory Group and the Manager have learned over the course of this pandemic about the importance of staying focused on our key priority areas. This report will highlight actions taken by the federation over the past year which were in response to the evolving situation with regard to the pandemic and discuss how, through taking these actions, the NELF remained committed to its priority areas and to the priorities identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award Letter.

### ***Priority One: Building Capacity (aligning with the Improved Access to Professional Learning Opportunities for the Library Community priority identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter)***

By creating opportunities for those involved in member libraries (trustees, Library directors and library staff) to get together and share ideas and expertise, we build capacity and enhance collaboration.

#### **Action: Focus on Communications**

It was immediately apparent that communication was going to be key for member libraries as they began to navigate the myriad of directives and numerous updates and other pieces of information about library services during the pandemic. Boards and Library Directors were feeling overwhelmed and unsure. The federation manager hosted a series of joint video-conference meetings of NELF and NCLF Library Directors during the early stages of the pandemic and continued to host video-conference meetings for NELF Library Directors as the situation evolved. These provided an opportunity for information sharing – helping library leaders in smaller and more remote communities learn from each other about the community of practice.

The federation also hosted a joint videoconference for NELF and NCLF library staff responsible for Summer Reading Club so that they could share their ideas and tips for building a series of activities that would keep children engaged with reading over a summer like no other in living memory.

The board expanded its meeting agendas to include more time for round the table updates and discussions – an opportunity for member boards to share their situation and hear from other boards.

In 2021, the federation will be looking at expanding the number of staff roundtables it hosts. The federations are also jointly working with the BC Library Trustee Association on a similar concept for Federation Board members.

**Action: Release Conference Attendance Subsidies**

As it became clear that the directives from the Provincial Health Officer would be in place for some time and that this would have prevented people from attending annual conferences, the Board made the decision to release the funds that had been budgeted to support conference attendance for trustees and library staff in member libraries. The funds could then be available to member libraries to support online learning. The board also agreed that while the emphasis would be on online learning, given the financial pressure that libraries would be under to provide additional online resources and purchase personal protective equipment and additional cleaning supplies, boards would have discretion as to how the funds could be utilized.

**Action: Provide Online Learning Opportunities Paid for by the Federation**

The federation paid for the renewal of the *Homelessness Training Institute's Librarians' Guide to Homelessness*. This is an online training tool designed to assist library staff in becoming more familiar and comfortable with dealing with issues related to homelessness and patrons with difficulties. The federation also paid for those member libraries who wished to have their staff attend the series of online Customer Service training sessions created for Public Library InterLINK. The federation also offered to cover the cost for library staff who might want to enroll in a six-week grant writing workshop through Kelowna Community Resources being offered in 2021 and for Library Directors wanting to enroll in a Tech Workshop for Library Directors developed by the Kootenay Library Federation.

Without support, many of the smaller libraries in the federation would be unable to afford to provide these kinds of online training opportunities for their staffs and boards.

***Priority Two: Sharing Resources and Increasing Access (Aligning with Improved Regional and Local Shared Services Delivery priority identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter)***

NELF member libraries are committed to providing exceptional library experiences no matter where people live.

**Action: Establish a NELF Overdrive Advantage Collection Fully Funded by the Federation**

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, NELF member libraries saw and continue to see a significant increase in demand for loanable, downloadable audiobooks and ebooks. NELF member libraries were depending on the provincial Overdrive Consortium collection, managed by the BC Libraries Cooperative and supported by public libraries in BC, to provide patrons with access to these types of resources. Pressure on this collection has been extreme and as a result, patrons could wait months to access a title.

NELF member library patrons also prefer audiobooks to ebooks and as the provincial Overdrive Consortium collection is more heavily weighted to the purchase of e-books, patrons in our federation were waiting significantly longer to access audiobook titles. As a result, patrons were becoming disillusioned with local libraries.

In late December, the NELF established, and agreed to fully fund through to the end of 2021, a NELF Overdrive Advantage collection for the sole use of NELF member library patrons. Patrons continue to place their holds through the provincial Overdrive Consortium collection but if they are searching for items that are also in the NELF collection, the request is now being filled through the NELF Overdrive Advantage collection. As the NELF collection is weighted so that 50% of the dollars purchases audiobooks and 50% purchases e-books, has a lower holds-to-copy ratio, and is based on what patrons in our federation are expressing interest in reading, our patrons now have access to the titles they are looking for, in the format they prefer, much more quickly than if they used the provincial Overdrive Consortium collection alone.

There will be an evaluation of collection usage and patron response in June 2021.

***Priority Three: Strengthening Relationships (Aligning with Improved Regional and Local Shared Services Delivery and Service Expansion Beyond Community Borders priorities identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter)***

One positive outcome of having to pivot because of the pandemic was the increase in collaboration among the six federations, the BC Library Trustees Association, and the Association of BC Public Library Directors.

**Action: Strengthen Partnerships with Other Federations, the BC Library Trustees Association, and the Association of BC Public Library Directors**

From my perspective, the collaboration among the six library federations has also been the most impactful. We have focused much of our attention on creating learning opportunities for both Library Directors and library staff and in the coming year will be evaluating how effective that training has been.

***Priority Four: Increasing the Awareness of the Value of Public Libraries to the Communities They Serve (Supporting BC's Strategic Plan for Public Library Service priority identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter)***

The federation board believes that we build the awareness of the value of public libraries to the communities we serve by demonstrating effective governance at both the local and federation levels and by ensuring that public libraries in our region are working together.

**Action: Complete a Library Director Salary Survey**

The 2020 Library Director Salary Survey (covering libraries in both the NCLF and NELF – excepting Prince George Public Library and Cariboo Regional District Library which were excluded because of the size of the population they serve and in the case of the CRDL, the governance model) was a comprehensive survey including not just compensation and benefit

information but information about the population served by the various libraries, the type of library (municipal or PLA), the number of staff in the complement, education, experience, and years in the position. The survey is a way of communicating value as Library Directors are modestly paid but the libraries that they manage deliver high quality services and during the Covid-19 pandemic have been at the vanguard of community organizations continuing to provide services even as communities have had to contend with significant service shut-downs.

Work has already begun on a Library Staff Salary Survey, to be completed by spring 2021, which will look at not only compensation and benefits but compare the various positions working in public libraries in the NCLF and NELF in terms of duties, education, and experience.

***Priority Five: Enhancing Governance (Supporting BC's Strategic Plan for Public Library Service priority identified in the 2020 Provincial Federation Grant Award letter)***

The federation board believes in demonstrating sound governance at both the local and federation levels and in ensuring that public libraries within our region are seen to be working effectively together – leveraging our resources and our expertise for the good of all our communities.

**ACTION: Ensure Ongoing Orientation to the Federation**

An orientation to the federation continues to be updated and is available to local boards. The orientation presentation is being used at member library board meetings, building understanding of the NELF's vision, mission and strategic priorities, the rationale for the federation and a better sense of NELF's services and how they benefit member libraries.

**CONCLUSION**

By remaining committed to our key strategic areas despite the uncertainty created by the pandemic, the libraries of the North East Library Federation have continued to work together to build a collaborative network dedicated to creating opportunities to strengthen federation member libraries. We continue to hold true to our belief that strong libraries build strong communities. Thank you for continuing to support us as we work to fulfill our vision.

Respectfully Submitted,

M. Edel Toner-Rogala, Manager