



# North East Library Federation

## OUR VISION

**Strong libraries; strong communities**

## **2021 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 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, Pouce Coupe Public Library, Taylor Public Library and Tumbler Ridge Public Library.

In October 2021, the NELF hired a new director, Thomas Knutson, who replaced the outgoing manager, Edel Toner-Rogala. At this time, the position title was changed from *manager* to *director* to align with the other federations. The Librarians Advisory Group was similarly renamed the Library Directors Advisory Group, for clarity.

### ***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 2021 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
- ✓ Furthering provincial strategic initiatives for public library service

### ***2021 – Ongoing Uncertainty***

The federation's workplan for 2021 was to focus on delivering specific actions tied to each of the federation's five strategic priorities. However, while the COVID-19 provincial state of emergency declared under the Emergency Program Act ended on June 30, 2021, measures such as the use of a proof of vaccination passports and indoor capacity limits were extended into 2022.

The NELF Board, the Library Directors Advisory Group (LDAG), and the NELF Manager refocused their activities on continuing to stay aligned with the strategic priorities. This report highlights actions taken by the federation over the past year which were in response to the continuing situation with regard to the pandemic, and discuss how, through these actions, the NELF remained committed to both its strategic priorities and the priorities expressed in the 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 2021 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**

As the COVID-19 pandemic and health restrictions continued throughout 2021, trustees, library directors, and library staff came to rely increasingly on video-conferencing for information sharing through regular meetings and training opportunities, and to support one another through such new and challenging situations as enforcing compliance with proof of vaccination protocols. Because of the heavy reliance on video-conferencing, the federation manager made the NCLF Zoom account available to the NELF Board and LDAG. Both groups have embraced using the platform over teleconferencing.

The federation directors continued to meet regularly online to share local updates and information, and plan staff training opportunities. These meetings also served as an effective support forum to the two newest incoming directors of the NCLF/NELF and the NWLF.

The federation continued its 2020 commitment to host roundtables to facilitate information sharing. Both the children's services and interlibrary loan (ILL) roundtables met once each (May 20 and June 2, respectively), with several libraries attending each session. The LDAG reported that the participants found the meetings very useful, and more are planned for 2022, as well as a joint ILL roundtable with member libraries from the Northwest Library Federation.

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

#### **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 prevent people from attending annual conferences, the NELF 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, individual boards would have discretion as to how the funds could be utilized. One valuable consortium purchase made by the federation on behalf of member libraries was a button maker and supplies for each location for both programming and promotional purposes the long term.

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

The federation renewed its subscription to the *Homeless Training Institute's Librarian's Guide to Homelessness*. This online training tool is designed to help library staff become more familiar with and comfortable handling such social issues as homelessness, dementia, and violence in the workplace. The addition of new staff to the registration list throughout 2021 underscores the ongoing value of the training series for all levels of staff. Of the 137 individuals who started the multi-session core series, 47 completed the training by the end of 2021 (Note: statistics reflect participation by North Central and North East staff as it is a joint subscription). Staff also registered for a wide variety of other training modules.

NELF member libraries continue to have access to *Customer Service Training* through Public Library InterLINK. The *Safe Harbour Respect for All* program, designed to be an introduction to the topics of respect and inclusion delivered as an online course by AMSSA, was rolled out in February. The course is free for library workers in BC, and was promoted by the NELF manager through email and on the NELF homepage. Library staff were also able to take advantage of courses in using Zoom for programming, technology for library directors, and workplace

violence prevention provided by Arete Safety Training. Feedback on the Arete program was very positive.

In February, the NELF Manager participated in a series of two workshops organized by IslandLINK – *Connect and Engage on Zoom*, focused on how to make virtual programming more interactive. The Manager also participated in *Library Technology Topics*, a three-part series offered by the Kootenay Library Federation in partnership with Selkirk College. The federation covered the registration fees for seven trustees to attend the BCLTA's Governance Workshop.

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 2021 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 had 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, 2020, the NELF established, and agreed to fully fund through to the end of 2021, an 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 funds 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 title they are looking for, in the format they prefer, much more quickly than if they used the provincial OverDrive Consortium collection alone.

As planned in 2020, an evaluation was conducted and released at the end of August 2021 to assess the effective of the collection and the use of funds towards that collection. The holds ratio comparators demonstrated that NELF library holds were being filled faster through the collection, underscoring the value of the initiation. Recommendations resulting from the

evaluation include continuing to build the collection with a 50/50 balance between e-books and audio books. Purchases funded by the federation will continue to be triggered by a minimum of 5 federation-based holds. A follow-up evaluation will be conducted in 2022.

***Priority Three: Strengthening Relationships (Aligning with Improved Regional and Local Shared Services Delivery, and Service Expansion Beyond Community Borders priorities identified in the 2021 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, as well as reaching out to the broader community to develop new resources.

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

This report has already mentioned several instances where these groups have come together in the past year – working with the BCLTA on a roundtable for federation board members and working with the ABCPLD on the New Library Director Virtual Orientation. The collaboration among the six library federations has also been impactful, focusing much of the attention on brainstorming and creating learning opportunities for both library directors and library staff. Additionally, the NELF director has benefited directly from this forum through ongoing guidance and consultation from other directors.

The opportunity to work with so many committed professionals who all share a passion for the work of public libraries has been a light of encouragement during an extended period of isolation.

**Action: Partner with Northern Health to Develop and Deliver Cognitive Care Kits**

The North Central and North East federations and Northern Health (NH) initiated a new partnership to develop and distribute cognitive care kits to libraries in both NCLF and NELF (Prince George and Burns Lake Public Libraries were already using them). The kits support caregivers and those experiencing dementia loss by providing meaningful activities, and also help libraries strengthen connections with local organizations in the community supporting those with dementia. By the end of 2021, NH had assembled and started to ship more than 25 kits. NH also developed training to be delivered to library staff in conjunction with program roll-out in early 2022, including how to build kits to reflect local community interests. An evaluation will be conducted by the NELF director and NH in 2022 to assess the effectiveness of the initiative, and to establish further goals to promote and circulate this important resource in northern communities, where dementia-related services are often quite limited.

***Priority Four: Increasing the Awareness of the Value of Public Libraries to the Communities They Serve (Furthering Provincial Strategic Initiatives for Public Library Service priority identified in the 2021 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 Staff Salary Survey**

The 2020 Library Director Salary Survey, covering libraries in both the NCLF and NELF – Prince George Public Library (PGPL) and Cariboo Regional District Library (CRDL) were excluded because of the size of the population they serve and because of CRDL’s 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 Library Directors Survey was complemented by the Library Staff Salary Survey, completed in September, 2021. The survey looked at not only compensation and benefits but compared the various positions working in public libraries in the NCLF and NELF in terms of duties, education, and experience. Again, the CRDL and PRPL were not included due to significantly larger populations; Fort St. James and Mackenzie Public Libraries were not included as they are unionized.

As with the Library Directors survey, the Staff survey is included under this priority as it communicates the value that modestly paid library staff continue to deliver high quality services, and during the COVID-19 pandemic have been at the vanguard of community organizations maintaining services even as communities and organizations have had to contend with significant service reductions or shut-downs.

***Priority Five: Enhancing Governance (Furthering Provincial Strategic Initiatives for Public Library Service priority identified in the 2021 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: 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.

**Action: Initiate new trustee orientation and advocacy training opportunity**

The federation directors identified the need for training that strengthens the federations' trustees' ability to champion the unique value that they and their respective federations contribute to BC's public library landscape. In late 2021, the directors initiated a new joint collaboration with Babs Kelly at the BCLTA to refine these goals and outcomes, and to develop the workshop. The sessions will be delivered in spring of 2022.

**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. We are deeply grateful for the ongoing support providing by the Public Libraries Branch through funding, and professional expertise and guidance. Thanks to this continued commitment, library staff, users and community members across Northern British Columbia have access to the wider range of services and resources to enrich their lives through the vision of the North East Library Federation.

Respectfully Submitted,

M. Edel Toner-Rogala, Manager (Jan-Oct 2021)  
Thomas Knutson, Director (Oct-Dec 2021)  
director@nelf.ca  
(250) 387-8772