

INTRODUCTION

Northwest British Columbia encompasses the North Coast, Kitimat-Stikine, and Bulkley-Nechako regions. We acknowledge that these regions exist on the traditional territory of First Nations people, including the Haida, Haisla, Gitksan, Nisga'a, Tsimshian, and Wet'suwet'en Nations. The vast area is known for being a habitat for many species of wildlife, including grizzly bears, cougars, moose, wolves, and salmon. For human dwellers, it offers magnificent freshwater and saltwater fishing, paddling, hiking, skiing, and snowmobiling.

The Northwest Library Federation (NWLF) is comprised of seven public libraries, located in Houston, Smithers, Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, and Stewart. These communities range in size from approximately 400 to 12,220 people. As a result, the NWLF member libraries continually contend with a disparity in terms of patron access to both physical and digital resources, as well as programs and services.

The North Coast and Bulkley-Nechako regions have consistently had more unemployment than most other regions of the province. Most of the employment in this region is in the Services-producing sector. According to a 2017 survey, the industries that represented the largest share of employment in the North Coast and Bulkley-Nechako regions were retail trade, construction, health care/social assistance, transportation/warehousing, and forestry/logging. Approximately 66,100 people of employable age (15+) live in the North Coast and Bulkley-Nechako regions. In January 2020, the unemployment rate for this region was 3.5 percent, which is an improvement on previous years.

Statistics courtesy of the Province of British Columbia, WorkBC: [North Coast & Nechako](#)

NWLF STRATEGIC GOALS IN 2019 AND BEYOND

2019 marked the final year of the 2017-19 NWLF strategic plan. In October 2019, the NWLF Board and Library Directors gathered in Smithers to create a new strategic plan that will guide the Federation's goals and priorities from 2020-2022.

Throughout 2019, the NWLF worked toward completing the remaining action items in the 2017-19 strategic plan under the following strategic goals:

1. Increase service equity between member libraries (see Priority 1: Improving Access)
2. Enhance library services in the region (see Priority 2: Developing Skills)
3. Create a community of member libraries (see Priority 3: Collaborating on Shared Goals)

These priorities have shifted and expanded slightly with the new strategic plan.

PRIORITY 1: IMPROVING ACCESS

Related NWLF strategic goal: Increase service equity between member libraries

Books for BC Babies and Book Club Sets: The NWLF continued to participate in two inter-federation programs, Books for BC Babies and Book Club Sets. These programs give libraries throughout the province greater capacity

to maximize resources, as well as to address community needs. Members of the general public in northwestern BC greatly benefited from both the Book Club Sets and Books for Babies in 2019, which promote and enhance literacy while making life more affordable (provincial government commitment).

Database & Technology Subsidies: The NWLF provided member libraries with database & technology subsidies on a sliding scale to create a more even playing field in the provision of database access for patrons and technology upgrades for libraries. In 2019, these funds supported the purchase/renewal of core database services such as EBSCO, as well as innovative sites like Vidcode (a coding site for beginners).

It is worth noting that a few member libraries decided to forego receiving their portion of the database subsidy in 2019 to move more funding into our budget for Programs & Tours, which enabled the Federation to book a tour with award-winning storyteller, Ivan Coyote.

Regional Tours

- *Leif David Tour:* Leif David brought his magic show "Imagine the Impossibilities" to each of the 7 communities in the NWLF region. These events took place either in the public library, or at a local elementary school in partnership with the public library. Attendance ranged from approximately 50 to 250 people, depending on the community population and venue capacity. Feedback on the 2019 tour was extremely positive. Rebecca Mitchell (Stewart PL) shared that "every single part of the show was high quality and professional. The children's screams of excitement were evidence enough that they thoroughly enjoyed it." Virginia Charron (Kitimat PL) reflected: "This was likely the best show I have seen in all the shows at our Library—and I have been here almost 20 years! Congratulations on a professional and thoroughly entertaining event."
- *Ivan Coyote: Small Towns, Short Stories:* In mid-September, the NWLF sponsored a tour with renowned author and storyteller, Ivan Coyote. In addition to performing with 6 of our 7 member libraries, Coyote also visited a number of schools throughout the duration of the tour. We received glowing feedback on Coyote's shows from audience members and event organizers alike. One organizer shared: "Ivan made a big impact on many people here [...] Audience members commented that Ivan was inspirational." At a show attended by 680 people, the organizer remarked that "even with a full audience of young people, while Ivan was speaking, you could have heard a pin drop." The NWLF is grateful to Ivan Coyote for touring northwestern BC and sharing their powerful, oftentimes humorous stories about family, class, social justice, and queer liberation.

PRIORITY 2: *DEVELOPING SKILLS*

Related NWLF strategic goal: Enhance library services in the region

Training and Course Fee Subsidies

The NWLF provided funding for at least 9 library staff members to take part in online and in-person professional development opportunities. Ongoing staff training is vital to continually delivering library services people can count on, which is another key commitment of the provincial government. Some of these training sessions included:

- *Emergency First Aid for Industry*—Library staff members from Kitimat received emergency First Aid training.
- *Attendance at BCLA and CATS Conferences*—The Library Director in Hazelton used the training subsidy to assist with registration fees and travel expenses for two provincial conferences.

- *Library Director Boot Camp*—The Library Director in Stewart used the training subsidy to assist with expense related to the 2019 Library Director Boot Camp.

PRIORITY 3: COLLABORATING ON SHARED GOALS

Related NWLF strategic goal: Create a community of member libraries

Creating Community: These efforts are primarily communications based, and include:

- Regular teleconference meetings with the NWLF Board of Directors
- Regular phone and email conversations with the Library Directors Advisory Group, as required
- *NWLF Member News:* The NWLF produces a regular newsletter with over 100 subscribers. Each issue includes an update on Federation activities, a list of upcoming webinars and courses for staff and trustee professional development, and inspirational stories or articles from the world of libraries. The newsletter is sent to every staff and board member in the Federation, as well as several staff/board contacts beyond the region and from related organizations. With an open rate of over 50% and a click rate of approximately 30%, this tool continues to offer value to members of the NWLF. The NWLF receives ongoing requests from beyond the Federation to be added to the mailing list. In addition, the NWLF consistently receives notes of appreciation for the value of this service from its members and other stakeholders.

Sharing Resources:

- Resource sharing between member libraries: Smithers PL staff borrowed costumes from Kitimat PL, which were worn during the Fall Fair Parade promoting recognizable characters from books.
- Ongoing discussion re: creating a shared collection of legal resources across the Federation with LawMatters grant funding.
- Wendy Wright (Smithers PL), Beth Dimond (Prince Rupert PL), and Ruth Cooper (Hazelton PL) collaborated on a panel session for the 2019 BCLA Conference focused on the Summer Reading Club and serving First Nation communities. This collaborative session demonstrated the individual actions and commitments NWLF member libraries have taken toward lasting reconciliation with First Nations in BC.

2019 Strategic Planning Session

In October 2019, the majority of NWLF Board and LDAG members gathered in Smithers to create a new strategic plan. This session was facilitated by NCLF/NELF Director, Edel Toner-Rogala. It was a lively and robust discussion that saw everyone re-evaluating the very mission and vision of the NWLF in an effort to make it more relevant and conscious of the needs of the individual communities we serve. More than one person remarked that it was one of the best strategic planning sessions they have ever taken part in. After reviewing a draft plan, Edel commented: "It's a solid, workable plan that's respectful of how much money the Federation has to spend."

Access the recently approved NWLF Strategic Plan here: [2020-22 Strategic Plan](#)

PRIORITY 4: ENHANCING GOVERNANCE

At the 2019 strategic planning session, the NWLF Director connected with Edel Toner-Rogala, who offered to assist with the creation of an NWLF Orientation Package aimed at individual member library trustees. The

purpose of this informational resource is to increase the understanding and appreciation of the role the NWLF plays within a local context.

The NWLF will also put more energy into offering relevant sessions for trustees at the 2020 Fall Conference, hopefully in close collaboration with the BCLTA.

LOOKING AHEAD

The NWLF Director, Board of Directors, and Library Directors Advisory Group are grateful to the Libraries Branch for its ongoing financial support and advice. We appreciate this funding, as well as the Branch's involvement in key board meetings and the important provincial perspective this lends to our regional priorities.

We anticipate an infusion of new ideas and energy within the NWLF in 2020, as the Federation welcomes a new Director and a couple of new board members. There is a new strategic plan in place, a tour with Andy the Musical Scientist organized for May 2020, and a regional conference scheduled for the fall.