



OUR VISION
Vibrant libraries; thriving communities

2020 LIBRARY FEDERATION OPERATING GRANT REPORT

INTRODUCTION:

Building upon historic relationships that go back to as early as the 1930s, the North Central Library Federation (NCLF) was established in 2007 with the goal of helping the libraries in the North Central interior of BC to work together to share resources and provide high-quality programs and services. Its purpose, as originally conceived, was to encourage and enable more people living in the region to take advantage of their community libraries. That purpose holds true today.

The federation serves 10 public libraries providing services and programs for the approximately 180,000 residents across three regional districts – Bulkley-Nechako, Cariboo and Fraser-Fort George. These libraries are Burns Lake Public Library, Cariboo Regional District Library, Fort St. James Public Library, Fraser Lake Public Library, Granisle Public Library, Mackenzie Public Library, McBride and District Public Library, Prince George Public Library, Valemount Public Library and Vanderhoof Public Library.

Strategic Goals – 2020-2022

In 2019, the NCLF Board and members of the Librarians Advisory Group identified the following four priority areas for the Strategic Plan – 2020-2022:

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

The federation believes 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 – A Change in Plans

The federation's workplan for 2020 was to focus on delivering specific actions tied to each of the federation's four strategic priorities. 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 NCLF Board, the Librarians Advisory Group and the Manager have learned over the course of this pandemic about the importance of staying focused on our strategic priorities. 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 NCLF stayed true to its strategic priorities 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 NCLF and NELF Library Directors during the early stages of the pandemic and several video-conference meetings for NCLF Library Directors as the situation continued to evolve. 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 NCLF and NELF 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 NCLF made its video-conferencing account available to NCLF member library boards as well as the NELF Board. What we discovered was that several NCLF board members did not have adequate, stable Internet access and so we reverted to teleconference calls. This certainly reaffirmed that for many living in the north central region of BC, Internet access is a significant barrier, even today.

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 Trustees 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 Librarian's 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.

Action: Deliver on the Key Activities Associated with the *Future-focused Library Leaders: A province-wide program supporting new library directors' professional development* Initiative

This project was funded by Libraries Branch in late 2019 and it built on the success of the *New Library Director Boot Camp* workshop held in June 2019.

Elements completed prior to March 15, 2020:

- Ongoing Support for Spring 2019 New Library Director Book Camp Cohort
- Coordinate a BC Libraries Cooperative Orientation for New Library Directors

Elements completed by December 31, 2020:

- Project to Define Board Expectations - This project involved conducting a series of one-on-one interviews with Library Board Chairs, or their designate, who had recently hired or who were in the process of hiring a new library director. The purpose was to get a better sense of what boards are experiencing as they recruit, interview, hire and orient a new library director. The final report and its recommendations focused on the themes identified through the in-person interviews and a focus group of interviewees.
- One-Time Personal Learning Plan Grants of \$500 for 16 New Library Directors (final report to be submitted by March 15, 2021)

Elements to be Completed by March 1, 2021:

- New Library Director Virtual Orientation – a collaboration with the Association of BC Public Library Directors (final report to be submitted by March 31, 2021)

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

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

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

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, NCLF member libraries saw and continue to see a significant increase in demand for loanable, downloadable audiobooks and ebooks. NCLF 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.

NCLF 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 NCLF established, and agreed to fully fund through to the end of 2021, an NCLF OverDrive Advantage collection for the sole use of NCLF 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 NCLF collection, the request is now being filled through the NCLF OverDrive Advantage collection. As the NCLF 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 title 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 the 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

I have 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. From my perspective, the collaboration among the six library federations has also been 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.

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.

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 sound governance at both the local and federation levels and by 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 NCLF's vision, mission and strategic priorities, the rationale for the federation and a better sense of NCLF's services and how they benefit member libraries.

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. I include this activity under this strategy as 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 content 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.

CONCLUSION

By staying true to our strategic priorities during a time of great uncertainty, the North Central Library Federation has continued to work together with its member libraries to strengthen libraries, improve literacy and build stronger communities in the north central region of British Columbia. We remain committed to our belief that vibrant libraries lead to thriving communities. Thank you for continuing to support us as we work to achieve our vision.

Respectfully Submitted,

M. Edel Toner-Rogala, Manager