INTRODUCTION:

The North Central Library Federation 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.

As was the case in 2017, the year was marked by challenges and change. The communities of Burns Lake, Fraser Lake and Fort St. James to the west of Prince George and Quesnel to the south felt the impact of wild fires that raged in late July and all of August and while the number of people evacuated to Prince George and the surrounding area did not reach the numbers experienced in 2017, once again public libraries in the region stepped up to provide internet access for evacuees and to offer programming as well as access to library collections for those children and adults who had been evacuated from their homes. Three library directors also resigned or retired in 2018, two of whom after over 20 years of service in their positions, and in addition, there were changes at the NCLF board level with the Chairperson stepping down after serving as a board member since 2013 and as the Chairperson since 2015.

The board continued its work of implementing its 2017-2018 Strategic Plan, developed in the fall of 2016.
The plan identifies three strategic priorities:

- Building Capacity – which aligns with the provincial priorities of fostering equitable access to information and services and developing skills and knowledge.
- Sharing Resources – which aligns with the provincial priority of working together; and
- Addressing Challenges – which aligns with the provincial priority of enhancing governance.

**Priority One: Fostering Equitable Access to Information and Services**

In 2018, the federation manager, along with colleagues from Mackenzie Public Library and Prince George Public Library, participated in the Digital Resources Consultation Group. Under the guidance of the BC Libraries Cooperative’s Licensing Business Function Group, the working group, made up of representatives of public libraries across the province, consulted with public libraries in BC to develop recommendations regarding a core collection of digital resources for BC public libraries and provided a recommendation and proposal to the Ministry of Education in August.

One significant highlight from the NCLF’s involvement in this working group was the experience of working with colleagues across the province. The sub-group charged with developing the evaluation tool created criteria which was not only useful for the purpose of identifying potential resources for inclusion in a core digital resources collection, it provided a template for use at the local library level.

**Priority Two: Developing Skills and Knowledge**

Board and staff training and development continue to be a priority for the NCLF. In 2018, the federation provided $10,000 to federation members to help them send staff and board members to attend library conferences, such as BCLA, and an additional $4,500 to assist boards with sending trustees to attend Trustee Orientation Training provided by the BCLTA. In addition, the federation sets aside funds to assist each federation member in providing online training for its staff. In 2018, the federation provided $2,500 to federation members so that their staffs could participate in online courses and webinars.

The federation also regularly builds professional development into face-to-face meetings of the Board and Librarians Advisory Group. At the fall meeting, the focus was on competency-based performance management. As one library director noted, “At the fall workshop I appreciated the relevant subject matter, and also the opportunity to hear from my colleagues in our region. Having Ana, previously the Library Director of Chetwynd, present meant that her experience of a small library in northern BC was very relatable to ours. It also helped build my network of "local" resources, as she continues work in Prince George.”

Without support, many of the smaller libraries in the federation would be unable to afford to provide these kinds of in-person and online training opportunities for their staffs and boards. In
total, in 2018 the federation committed nearly 40% of the total dollars it had available for training and development for staff and trustees from member libraries.

**Priority Three: Working Together**

In 2018, the federation facilitated over $40,000 in consortium purchasing. The federation renegotiated a federation license for the e-product, Gale Courses, an online resource providing instructor led and highly interactive courses covering a variety of topics, many career-related. If individual libraries were to subscribe on their own the base price would be in excess of $4,000 USD, regardless of population. Subscribing through the federation, the license cost is a fraction of that – under $300 USD for the federation’s smallest library. The federation also negotiated public performance rights and managed licenses for Ancestry, Library Edition and Canadian Subsidy Directory for federation libraries wishing to participate and was able to achieve savings for member libraries here as well.

The federation facilitated the *Shooting Stars Theatre* tour of member libraries, in support of *Summer Reading Club 2018*. In a day long workshop, participants focused on developing a story and characters that would become a play to be shared with the community at the end of the day. While two workshops had to be rescheduled due to the wild fires, the remaining eight were very successful. The federation also organized an author tour for member libraries in October. Graeme Pole, a paramedic, lives with his family near Hazelton BC and has been writing professionally since 1989. Best known for his wilderness and historical essays, Graeme’s novel, *Siren Call*, is his first work of fiction. The federation was successful in securing a Writer’s Union of Canada funding under the National Public Readings Northern Program to support part of Graeme tour. These kinds of quality programming would not be possible for the smaller libraries in the region to offer on their own.

The federation supports the sharing of resources across federations. Those member libraries using the SITKA ILS continued to participate the highly successful province-wide InterLibrary Connect program. In addition, in 2018, libraries in the North Central Library Federation, the North East Library Federation, North West Library Federation, IslandLINK, and the Kootenay Library Federation again collaborated on the purchase of book club sets of popular titles. Sets can be borrowed by libraries across federations on behalf of their patrons – providing more variety without the need for individual libraries to maintain and house huge collections.

Again, this year, the North Central Library Federation and the North East Library Federation collaborated a to hire a library student under the Young Canada Works program. The student worked to refresh the NCLF and the NELF websites and created a new LibPress format website for the BC Libraries Staff Competencies Matrix.

In total in 2018, the federation dedicated nearly 30% of the total dollars it had available for initiatives focusing on shared resources and programs.
Priority Four: Enhancing Governance

A main focus for the NCLF Board in 2018 was enhancing governance.

In March, it was brought to the federation’s attention that any changes made to the federation’s original agreement from 2007 required Ministerial approval. This provided the board with an opportunity to review the agreement over the late spring and summer. An updated agreement was adopted in the late fall and submitted for Ministerial approval in November.

A presentation on the federation, to be used by member boards as an orientation to the NCLF, was also developed in 2018. The purpose of the presentation is to give member boards:

- an understanding of the NCLF’s vision, mission and strategic priorities;
- an understanding of the rationale for federations such as the North Central Library Federation (NCLF);
- a bit more of the history of this federation;
- a better sense of NCLF’s services and how they benefit member libraries;
- information about how the NCLF’s annual budget is determined and spent;
- insights into the NCLF’s governance structure; and
- information about the role of NCLF Board members, as well as that of the Librarians Advisory Group and federation staff.

The NCLF Board and Librarians Advisory Group previewed the presentation in April and recommended changes to improve clarity and provide additional information. The presentation was taken to the Mackenzie Public Library Board in September, where it was very well received, and will be taken to other boards in 2019.

Conclusion:

The libraries of the North Central Library Federation continue to work together to strengthen libraries in the north. The NCLF believes that vibrant libraries lead to thriving communities. We thank the Ministry of Education for its continuing support as we work to achieve our vision.