INTRODUCTION:

The North East Library Federation was established in 2007 with 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 and District Public Library and Tumbler Ridge Public Library.

In 2018 the board continued its work of implementing its 2017-2018 Strategic Plan, developed in 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 a colleague from Fort Nelson 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.
The NELF provides at total of $7,500 per year (nearly 10% of its total budget for initiatives) to member libraries to support their purchasing of online databases. NELF member libraries can also participate in licensing agreements negotiated by the NCLF for products such as Gale Courses, an online resource providing instructor led and highly interactive courses covering a variety of topics, many career-related. In 2018, member libraries used the funds to defray the costs of products such as Ancestry, Library Addition and Gale Courses.

**Priority Two: Developing Skills and Knowledge**

The federation sets aside funds, in 2018 the amount was $7,500, to assist federation members in providing online training for their staffs and a further $7,000 to help them send staff and board members to attend library conferences, such as the annual BCLA and BCLTA conferences. This $14,500 represents 24% of NELF’s total budget for initiatives. Without this support, many of the smaller libraries in the federation would not be able to afford to provide these kinds of online and in-person training opportunities for their staffs and boards.

In addition, the NELF continues to be the leader in and financial steward for the Library Staff Online Training Project, offered in partnership with Royal Roads University (RRU), the North Central Library Federation and the Kootenay Library Federation. It is important to acknowledge the Ministry of Education, Libraries Branch and the substantial support that the partners have received from the Ministry for this project over the past several years – without this funding support, the project would not have come to fruition. All six courses in the new *Building Futures: Strategic Skills for Library Management* certificate were developed in 2018, based the on gaps and training needs of library staff at the management and leadership level. Five of the six courses in the certificate had been delivered by year end. The remaining course in the certificate is currently running to March 8, 2019. All four new courses for employees at the staff level were also developed, based the on gaps and training needs of library staff at that level. Two of the four courses designed for these staff were delivered by year end. Of the remaining courses, one ran from January 7 to February 1, 2019 and the last one will run from March 4 to March 29, 2019.

The NELF also maintains the BC Libraries Staff Competencies Training Matrix, an online tool designed to facilitate access to, and use of the Competency Index for the library field and to assist employees and supervisors in identifying training opportunities, inside and outside of libraries, targeting specific competencies. Again, in 2018, the North East Library Federation and the North Central Library Federation collaborated a to hire a library student under the Young Canada Works program. In addition to working on refreshing the NELF and NCLF website, the student created a new LibPress format website for the BC Libraries Staff Competencies Matrix, now known as [bclibslearn.libraries.coop](http://bclibslearn.libraries.coop). The federation would like to acknowledge the technical support of the BC Libraries Cooperative whose staff greatly assisted with this transition.
Priority Three: Working Together

Again, in 2018, the North East Library Federation coordinated the purchase of Books for BC Babies materials on behalf of libraries in the province. Thirty-five libraries across the province purchased materials—6,354 board books, 4,360 CDs with download cards and 2080 bags. The large volume of orders meant deep discounts from vendors. The board book, for example, retailed for over $11.00 on Amazon, while libraries paid $3.98 per copy.

The federation supports the sharing of resources across federations. Those member libraries using the SITKA ILS continued to participate in the highly successful province-wide InterLibrary Connect program. In addition, in 2018, libraries in IslandLINK, the Kootenay Library Federation, the North East Library Federation, the North Central Library Federation, and the North West Library 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. The federation acknowledges the work of NELF member library Hudson’s Hope Public Library which manages this program on behalf of all participating libraries.

The federation facilitated the Engage Sport North tour of member libraries, in support of Summer Reading Club 2018. Engage Sport North, is the only multi-sport organization of its kind in Northern BC and is dedicated to advancing sport participation and excellence in the north. It offers an introduction to sport opportunities and physical literacy skill development to children and adults and as the theme for SRC 2018 was “Motion Commotion”, Engage Sport North was the perfect partner! This kind of quality programming would not be possible for the smaller libraries in the region to offer on their own—the economics of scale created when 7 libraries participate are a real benefit!

Photos courtesy of Taylor Public Library
*Priority Four: Enhancing Governance*

A main focus for the NELF 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 NELF, was also developed in 2018. The purpose of the presentation is to give member boards:

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

The NELF Board and Library Directors Advisory Group previewed the presentation in May and recommended changes to improve clarity and provide additional information. The presentation was then forwarded to all member board for use at local board meetings.

**CONCLUSION:**

The libraries of the North East Library Federation continue to work together to build a collaborative network dedicated to creating opportunities to strengthen federation member libraries. The NELF believes that strong libraries build strong communities. We thank the Ministry of Education for its continuing support as we work to achieve our vision.