



February 13th, 2014

To: The Select Expert Panel on the Future of Canadian Libraries and Archives

The British Columbia Library Association (BCLA) is a non-profit, cross-sectorial, member association that furthers the interests of libraries and represents the needs of individual and institutional members. Established in 1911, BCLA currently represents over 850 individuals and institutions. The Association is actively growing with an eight percent increase in membership since 2012. This increase reflects BCLA's commitment to Intellectual Freedom issues and Information Policy advocacy.

BCLA would like to thank the Royal Society for the opportunity to contribute to The Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives Expert Panel Report. We reviewed the questions the Expert Panel distributed for consultation and suggest that BCLA's response is better articulated with the following examination of select areas of thinking that, in our view, are crucial to the future of libraries and archives in Canada.

The Expert Panel on the Future of Canadian Libraries and Archives' mandate is framed by the observation that "Libraries and archives throughout Canada have many overlapping obligations." These obligations include:

- The collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge
- Providing access to information and intellectual resources for civic agreement
- Meeting the challenges of unfolding digital technologies, changing cultural practices and society's expectations

The question BCLA would like to respond to is: if not libraries, then whom? Anne Herbert declared "Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries"¹ yet funding to libraries is decreasing and libraries are being shuttered, their staff laid off and their collections dispersed. The Expert Panel wanted to identify changes in resources, structures and competencies to ensure libraries and archives serve the Canadian public good into the 21st century. We suggest human resources in addition to collections—whether print or digital—need to be emphasized. Library and archival collections and services are not developed in isolation but in response to and in anticipation of the needs of Canadians whether they be research focused, rising from a need toward self-exploration, civic engagement or a desire to read/see/hear/participate within the cultural milieu. And, from a strictly pragmatic perspective, BC libraries have expanded to fill the gaps when services formerly offered by government agencies have been cut—a recent example being cuts to legal aid in this province. The Association is committed to analyze, support, and participate in the ongoing evolution of libraries and library services. Members are supported to develop new skills, to stay current on library issues, and to develop innovative approaches to advance library services and thinking.

As a cross-sectorial association BCLA membership includes individual and institutional members from public, academic, school, and special libraries as well as literacy organizations, students, trustees, and other library stakeholders. BCLA represents members from urban and rural geographies. BCLA is

¹ Herbert, Anne. "The Rising Sun Neighborhood Newsletter." In *The Next Whole Earth Catalog: Access to tools*, edited by Stewart Brand, (Sausalito, Calif. : Point , 1980), 331.



proactive in building partnerships and developing relationships with libraries, governments, and community organizations to advance the values of the Association and to promote a widespread understanding of the benefits of library and information services. How are we able to do this? Foundational to BCLA's work in advocacy and information is the support around these goals from our members. The Association believes that people, communities, and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas, and works of imagination for their social, cultural, educational, democratic, and economic well-being. We are able to advocate for libraries and library services for all British Columbians, including barrier-free facilities and resources, and open and equitable access to library services because our members have come to rely on us to lead the way. And, although a provincial association, BCLA has a national footprint and takes the lead on issues ranging from Lawful Access to Net Neutrality to media concentration to the elimination of the Mandatory Long Form Census and to the erosion of federal library services including the devastating cuts to the National Library and Archives of Canada.

In regards to Net Neutrality, BCLA is on record as recognizing that libraries and librarians have a vested interest in maintaining Net Neutrality, both as content providers and as a portal to content via the Internet. We feel it is the responsibility of library administrators and librarians, as guardians of the peoples' freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom and have resolved to affirm the right of all in our communities to equitable access to and use of the internet, free from commercial bias.²

Our membership overwhelmingly supports the Association's efforts in raising awareness of these issues through drafting the resolutions produced at the Association's AGM each year, by volunteering countless hours in educating fellow members and the public on issues affecting libraries by giving workshops, organizing salons and through contributing articles to the Association's open access journal *The BCLA Browser*.

Education and advocacy requires a sustained effort—and not just by libraries, their representative bodies and associations. The closure of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Libraries was announced more than 16 months ago, reported on briefly and then forgotten until those researchers who relied on the collections showed up one day and found their libraries—and the materials they needed to do their work--were gone. Is this how libraries will meet their obligations? By disappearing? BCLA wishes to underscore the importance of advocacy as key to ensuring Canadians continue to have access to the resources and services they have come to rely on as well as ensuring the development of future services and resources.

Let us not demonstrate our value by disappearing.

Sincerely,

Gwen Bird
President, British Columbia Library Association

² [British Columbia Library Association] Resolution on Network (Net) Neutrality. BCLA Annual General Meeting. Richmond, BC. 2008.