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Response of the Novanet Consortium of Libraries

Introduction

This brief was authored by the executive of Novanet and is submitted by Lynne Murphy, Novanet Chairperson. We are grateful to the Royal Society of Canada and Members of the Expert Panel for the opportunity to present the views of Novanet. We look forward to reading the findings and recommendations from the Panel.

1. What is the nature and make-up of your organization?

Novanet had its beginnings in 1982 when five Halifax universities formed a council to investigate the benefits of sharing one library system. Momentum gathered and in 1988 Novanet was established. Since then, the consortium of libraries has grown to include eleven post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia: Acadia University, Atlantic School of Theology, Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, NSCAD University, Nova Scotia Community College, St. Francis Xavier, Saint Mary's University, University of King's College, and Université Sainte-Anne. Library Directors at each institution occupy a seat on the Novanet Board. The Novanet office employs two full-time staff members, a Manager and a Systems Support Analyst. Novanet's mandate is to cooperate amongst members to enhance access to information and knowledge for the benefit of its user communities. This includes maintaining a common library management system (LMS), developing innovative approaches to resource sharing, and facilitating co-operative services and collection development initiatives among member libraries. The network reaches across the province and serves over 44,000 full-time equivalent university and community college students.

2. Does your organization provide services: (a) directly to Users? Or, (b) to members who make-up the organization?

Novanet provides services directly to its Users, mainly students, faculty and staff of the member institutions. Users also include off-campus borrowers who have access to various Novanet collections and services as residents of Nova Scotia. The Novanet office also serves the members who make up the organization, primarily through system maintenance and support.

3. In terms of Question 2, describe the services provided directly to Users, and if they are consortial in nature please describe the mechanisms in place to define, refine and measure the impact of the services, particularly as they relate to Canadians.

Novanet provides a number of common services and resources available to its Users across the province. Some of the services and resources are sustained and evaluated by the staff at member libraries in collaboration with the Novanet office. These services and resources include:

- Maintenance of a common library management system;
- In the majority of member institutions, support for a common discovery tool;
- Cross-institutional interlibrary loan (ILL) and document delivery;
- Borrow Anywhere, Return Anywhere options with extension services for Users at all public libraries in the province via membership in the Libraries Nova Scotia initiative;
- Pay anywhere for fines; and
- Live Help virtual chat reference service staffed by member libraries.

In addition to our regular resources and services, Novanet recently concluded a successful, collaborative eBook pilot project to provide all Users throughout the consortium with equal access to eBook content. This innovative initiative will be re-negotiated with vendors and publishers and slated to be offered going forward in the fall of 2014.

All institutional members are engaged in their own reference and instruction programs, copyright support, digitization and scholarly communication services. Formal statistics for purposes of measuring the impact of services are kept by the LMS for system functions (for example, circulation statistics) and statistics are also kept for consortial services such as Live Help. Novanet receives informal feedback from members and Users at any point in time. Periodically, Novanet surveys member staff to gather feedback on current and future resources and services. Members keep their own statistics, too, for planning and enhancement purposes and Users are normally surveyed by individual institutions.

Novanet services reach each student, faculty member and staff of the member institutions, but they are also available to any resident of Nova Scotia. The development of digital open access collections at various member institutions is growing and all libraries and archives in the consortium continually provide services and resources to interested Canadians. Many of the resources and services are promoted more on an institutional level or on a regional level through the Council of Atlantic University Libraries – Conseil des Bibliothèques universitaires de l'Atlantique (CAUL-CBUA).

4. Would Canadians know of, or understand, the contribution you make to library/archival service in Canada?

The Novanet association has existed for a long time and among the profession has a reputation for venturing in to uncharted academic library territory, most recently with initiatives such as the eBook pilot project, which has gained recognition and interest across North America. Any Canadian can gain access to Novanet holdings via the common portal LMS. Many Novanet institutions offer distance education and online learning options for anyone in the country and the Libraries support individual students and cohorts on an institutional and consortial level. With the recent joining of the Université Sainte-Anne, Novanet now offers French collections and LMS interface, providing access to French-speaking Users nationwide. Realistically, it would be Users and outside researchers - a select group of Canadians – who would know the contribution that Novanet makes to library and archival service in Canada.

5. What inhibits you from providing services that ultimately would improve library/archive services to Canadians?

Like libraries everywhere, the funding of Novanet does not keep pace with the needs for staffing and resources, especially for the provision of scholarly content online. As a group of institutions providing post-secondary education, our Users increasingly choose online learning options and Novanet libraries

face increasing expectations to offer appropriate infrastructure and skilled staff as rapid technological change continues.

6. What do you see as the challenges for libraries and archives in the forthcoming years?

Funding will be a major challenge in the forthcoming years from both external and internal sources. Libraries and archives will struggle to protect collections and find support to run digitization programs while rationalizing material across institutions. There will need to be a balance of support and resources put toward the increasing popularity of the Library as place – the physical presence for community building and learning – with support for building the virtual Library and the demand for information and services offered online. Staff changes present a major challenge when demographic shifts will bring large scale retirements, the replacement of fewer librarians, and the increase of outsourcing services. Cut backs in school libraries will result in generations of children who have not benefitted from as much literacy programming and guidance in the curriculum. Children could be less likely to develop an appetite for reading in school and in life which has a trickle-down effect for support in the future.

Missions of libraries, archives and museums will become increasingly aligned with similar interests in preserving knowledge and digitizing collections. Cultural shifts and the willingness to work together will be challenging in the years ahead, but libraries, archives and museums are stronger working as partners. Strategic partnerships will be imperative to establish economies of scale to seek and achieve mutual opportunities. How will Canadians know what we do and why it is important? Where can we share our stories that will reach the people? How do we highlight our collections and services and provide easy access for all Canadians? We need advocacy to build confidence in libraries and archives and build support for librarians as the professionals who should be leading them. Ownership of a centralized, national level presence for library and archival consortiums, associations, and other groups/organizations must be developed and promoted by all networks across the country to support the future of libraries and archives in Canada.

Novanet is a willing and able organization that has responded in part to these challenges, with collaboration being at the heart of our mission and mandate. Member libraries have formed a coalition and bond that seeks to sustain services and resources despite many challenges that exist today and have existed for some time. Novanet member libraries will seek to continue to respond to these challenges and innovate to remove obstacles from the horizon. However, as Novanet seeks to respond, we will continue to need the support, confidence and financial backing of our federal and provincial governments as well as our institutional leaders.

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