

September 26, 2013

**Canadian Federal Libraries Strategic Network response to the Royal Society of Canada's consultations.**

**Seven departments have shared their views with regards to the questions below. The responses will be summarized and collated to give an overall representation of the answers.**

**Libraries and Archives Public Consultations – Ottawa, October 4, 5**

Questions

**1. What is your mandate and who are your members?**

**Mandates** vary from:

- Natural Resources Canada develops and preserves information collections relevant to sustainable development of Canada's natural resources;
- National Research Council Knowledge Management has 4 programs under its mandate: provides foresight, portfolio and program support (competitive and market intelligence, collaboration support), enterprise information management (KM, NRC collection and access services), and National Science Library, serving other government departments and Canadians;.
- The Canadian Human Rights Commission provides services to internal staff which enables them to make informed decisions, create policies and programs for the Canadian population;
- Courts Administration Services provides services to its court clients across the country;
- The Canada School of Public Service Library offers information resources that will help the program delivery of the School in producing leading edge policies, programs, courses and strategic advice to their clientele;
- Atlantic Canadian Opportunities Association's mandate is to serve the research needs of the researchers and policy analysts of the agency by providing effective and efficient access to publications and other documents, data and information.

**Members (clients):**

Mostly internal employees and some have services offered to the public.

**2. From your collective perspective, what challenges or issues are most prominent for your organization today?**

- Federal budget cuts within the federal library community seem to have affected the amount of information and resources available to clients as well as supporting staff to maintain the provision of library services. Many libraries have seen their budgets reduced as well as staff reductions;
- Within some libraries, clients still prefer paper over digital, which means having larger spaces to hold information or less access as limited copies, in other cases, clients want all digital and do not understand why they cannot receive the material in digital format, when it is not available. Access to content is an important issue within different organizations;
- New technology seems to be a barrier as it can be cost prohibitive, takes a lot of time to learn an investigate especially with limited resources;
- The role and skills of librarians are often not understood by senior management and IT. They are conflicting roles and responsibilities with the IM specialists within the organization as well as added responsibilities or roles related to the Record Keeping Directive and Open Government policies;
- Misconception that a lot of the information can be found through Google or free online and that the library is not needed.
- A lot of content purchased is available on mobile devices and clients ask for viewing options, etc, however, often we cannot support their needs fully as we do not have the tools (tablets, phones, etc) to test and learn the products and see how the functionality works, especially since a lot of clients wish to use their personal devices.
- Libraries as a facility are also at risk, there should be more done to explore opportunities, especially with regards to technology and research and using the space as a learning environment.
- Positioning and promoting our library as a key source for information in our department
- Currently many of our key electronic resources are dependent on the availability of year-end funds, which is not sustainable.

**3. What do you anticipate as future challenges (by 2020), and how do you see you membership contributing to address them?**

**Challenges:**

- More budget cuts and possible clustering and centralization of library services within the federal government, collective buying of subscriptions, etc. Some see this as an advantage others a disadvantage especially in relation to the organizational knowledge and client awareness as it may be lost in the process and leading to a lower standard of information service;
- More competition with Google and other free tools and having clients or management wonder why we are paying as more and more information seems to be free online;
- Open access content changing the game with the publishing world, making it more accessible to get content;
- Impact of Open Data and Open Government, how is going to have an effect, but how much is yet to be determined, probably creating work, which has its pros and cons;
- Illusion that digitization projects will capture everything, which is not the case and often tends to be very expensive, beyond budget allocation.
- There is also a need to reach out to newer generations of users who are increasingly relying on non-traditional information sources (ie., Web 2.0) and who may be reluctant to use traditional library services (“Google is good enough.”)
- Librarians in the federal government need to promote the ongoing value of library services (value proposition) to senior management and departmental staff.

**Mitigation:**

- Having a human resource plan that build capacity and skills in specific areas of foresight and competitive intelligence;
- Finding innovative ways to work at all levels within the organization and across government, especially by leveraging new technologies and consortia buying;
- Monitor budget impacts and adjust services as appropriate;
- Use the current government agenda, such as Open Government and technology to leverage opportunities to engage with clients and Canadians;
- Clustering library acquisitions and services as a measure to save money and continue offering services.

**4. What would your organization be doing if funding were increased? And what are you not doing because of cutbacks or reduced funding?**

**Funding increase:**

- Overall most libraries would look at increasing their staff capacity which has been dwindled by budget cuts and attrition. Also provide more training for staff;
- They would also increase the access to more content, electronic journals, databases, collections, making their catalogue available to the general public, etc.
- Greater focus on technology and benefits like developing a mobile access strategy, etc.
- Advancing projects, for example one department was developing a new library iPortal, which is currently on hold due to budget cuts.

**Not doing or effects of budget cuts:**

- Slower response to reference services as less staff to deal with questions;
- Collection has shrunk and cannot guarantee content for clients;
- Regional collections/libraries closed;
- Cataloguing functions have been outsourced;
- Purchasing more relevant print and online resources.

**5. How does your organization relate to Library and Archives Canada (LAC)? Or, in your view, how *should* LAC relate to major archival and librarian organizations?**

With this question the answers were quite varied:

- Some responses quoted the act and policies around LAC, such as having a role in the IM policy development and implementation and having a legislated role to coordinate federal libraries. With that, LAC's mandate was also questioned as to being able to continue on with its mandate with limited resources and cutbacks. Can they ensure that they will preserve the written heritage of Canada for present and future generations, etc, as well as being the long term memory of federal public administration?
- It was suggested that LAC should become a Crown Corporation and focus maintaining the nation's published heritage and facilitating the library and archival community across the country and not be involved in the daily IM activities of the federal government.
- "We are both federal institutions but completely autonomous"
- Having our resources listed with LAC as part of a national union catalogue
- LAC is an important loaning organization, which has a lot of material not accessible to other organizations (either because lack of budget or otherwise). It is important that they continue that service.

- LAC plays an international role as the Canadian representative for standards in cataloguing, etc.
- LAC has the opportunity to play a larger role within the international community in leveraging the value of libraries, especially in the digital age where a lot of libraries are facing closures, etc. It could act as a conduit with international organizations like ILFA, ALA, etc to ensure that information, resources and archival materials are not lost (opportunity for stewardship).
- LAC should continue with its Government of Canada Web Archives (GCWA) project. The documents collected during the few years that LAC harvested our website are extremely useful for our library as we do not have a public electronic repository for the electronic publications that are removed from our site. Often we end up with only print copies of these documents in the library collection, while the clients expect electronic versions. The GCWA are an invaluable source of information relating to GoC departments that would otherwise be lost when the departmental sites are updated, or at least accessibility would be lost.

## **6. What other information would you like to add?**

One respondent wrote:

“The role of the professional librarian has been under attack over the past 20 years and technology has been the excuse. While it is essential that librarians have good training in technology skills, these are not the essence of the profession which is, or should be, in my humble opinion ‘using language skills to organize and retrieve information’. Libraries need to hire technologists in-house to deal with major technical issues rather than hiring a ‘technology librarian’. Conversely, in the IM and IT world, librarians should be hired to do the taxonomy and metadata work instead of technologists.”