



**Submission to the Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel on**  
***The Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives***

**Submitted by:**

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Public Library InterLINK (InterLINK) would like to thank the Expert Panel for this opportunity to speak to the importance of consortia in the provision of effective library services to all communities.

InterLINK is a federation of eighteen public libraries located in greater Vancouver, the Fraser Valley region, the Sunshine Coast, and Whistler-Pemberton-Lillooet regions. Public Library InterLINK is the business name of the InterLINK Federated Public Library System, which was established April 1st, 1994. InterLINK is built upon the foundations of the Greater Vancouver Library Federation (GVLF), which operated from 1975-1994.

InterLINK exists to coordinate certain library services between its 18 member libraries. InterLINK benefits its member libraries by achieving economies of scale on purchasing and by increasing the services and collections available to patrons of all member libraries through the creation of sharing mechanisms. InterLINK works primarily with the staff of its member libraries.

InterLINK was the first library federation created in British Columbia and serves the majority of the province's population. *Libraries Without Walls* (2004), the provincial strategic plan for public libraries, had collaboration as one of its main pillars, stating that the strategic plan would "encourage collaboration and partnerships to improve service delivery cost-effectively". This led to a number of initiatives, including the establishment of five additional federations across the province and the creation of the BC Public Libraries Cooperative.

*Libraries Without Walls* acknowledged the need for strong collaboration among libraries. One of the factors examined by the panel is that the development of consortia such as InterLINK should be encouraged in order to support public libraries facing increasing budgetary pressures in a generally stagnant funding environment. Public libraries are primarily funded at the municipal level. Funding received from other levels of government plays many roles, dependent on the size of the public library and the funding received from local governments. As noted, many towns and rural communities are too small to support needed technology. Working collaboratively can serve to bring disparate libraries together in the pursuit of programs of common interest.

Library consortia such as Public Library InterLINK should be supported, not only by their members, but by governments that recognize that incentivizing libraries to collaborate will provide service benefits as well as financial benefits. Consortia funding should not replace the grant regime that is in place to support the continuing operation of libraries in small towns and rural communities, but is recognition that support of collaborative initiatives provides benefits to libraries regardless of size.

In his *Facing the Future* report, Ken Roberts makes the point that it is through consortia that libraries will be able to take advantage of partnerships that arise outside of traditional library relationships. Roberts uses the example of the BC Libraries Cooperative securing membership in BCNET, giving the Cooperative access to the Canarie network. Such partnerships, which would be difficult for an individual library to develop and maintain, hold great potential.

There have been two eras of rapid expansion library consortia, the 1960s/early 1970s and the 1990s. The driving force behind the first era was resource sharing. The driving force behind the growth of consortia in the 1990's was the availability of online resources through the Internet (Horton, 2013). The first development was an attempt by the participating libraries to expand their collections by making their materials available to other consortia members on a reciprocal basis. The second development was in response to a new and expanding service that could be made more widely available if a better price point was secured by undertaking a group purchase. Horton (2013) also notes that support for consortia has often followed a "boom and bust" cycle and funding for consortia is often one of the first casualties during economic downturns.

InterLINK (and before it, the GVLFF) has been providing support to its members for close to four decades, having been developed during the first wave of consortia development. InterLINK has grown from its beginnings in the early 1970s as a small federation of seven libraries to a federation of 18 libraries serving 2/3 of the population of the province of BC. InterLINK's membership includes the majority of the province's largest libraries, but also some of the smallest libraries as well.

InterLINK has benefited from consistent and ongoing support from its member libraries and its government funders. There has been ongoing recognition by the government of British Columbia that working collaboratively in a deliberate fashion provides service benefits to all. There is also recognition by provincial funders that supporting this

collaboration provides a good return on investment. In the province of BC, where larger libraries are funded primarily by their municipalities, and smaller libraries rely on provincial funding for the most basic of services, provincial funds play a significant role in the development of collaborative programs and services. This funding is the great leveler, allowing participation by the largest number of libraries. It provides an incentive for larger libraries to "share", and allows smaller libraries to be at the table.

The question of how to encourage the development of consortia is a complex one. Any consideration of the role of government must include the need for collaboration amongst libraries. The future of libraries in many ways will depend on how well that collaboration is supported and encouraged. An active partnership, such as InterLINK has maintained for nearly two decades, and for two decades prior to that as the Greater Vancouver Library Federation, provides an excellent model that governments can look to for leadership. Libraries must continue to advocate to their municipal funders that collaboration provides benefits to all partners in a consortial relationship. The Libraries and Literacy Branch of the Province of British Columbia, through its vision of a network of federations throughout the province, in addition to its support in the development of the BC Libraries Cooperative, provides a blueprint for other "senior" levels of government to look to with regard to the role those levels should play in the support of public libraries.

*Respectfully submitted, January 27, 2014*

Sources:

Horton, Valerie, "Whither Library Consortia?" *Collaborative Librarianship* , 2013, Vol. 5 Issue 3, p150-153

Machovec, George, "Library Consortia: The Big Picture." *Journal of Library Administration* , February 2013, Vol. 53 Issue 2/3, p199-208

Roberts, Ken, Facing the Future: A Vision Document for British Columbia's Public Libraries, Ken Roberts Library Consulting. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from <http://kroberts.ca>.