

Why the Public Library is Important to Your Community

If it's been a while since you last visited your local public library, it's time to re-acquaint yourself with this important community asset. Public libraries generate economic activity around them, enhance cultural and social vitality, and contribute to a community's overall livability. The public library is a locus for community engagement and lifelong learning – providing free access to electronic resources, books, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, instructional materials; in-house and online reference services; space for book clubs, discussion groups, instructional sessions, quiet reading and study; literacy programming for all age levels and types of people – children, seniors, immigrants, job seekers, individuals with perceptual and other disabilities.

Local governments contribute upwards of 80% of public library funding in BC, so your support is crucial. If you need a reminder of how well this money is being used and how much the community benefits from library services, please stop by your local library or contact your board chair for a tour. Take some time to get to know us again...we guarantee you'll become a library champion!

Public Library Fast Facts

- Public library services can be accessed at any one of 243 public library facilities in British Columbia.
- Many electronic services can be accessed from anywhere you can connect to the Internet.
- In 2007, library boards were responsible for nearly \$170M in annual spending.
- Local governments fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual operating budgets.
- All BC public libraries established under the *Library Act* are eligible for provincially funded annual per capita operating grants – these totaled nearly \$10M in 2008/09.
- The Ministry of Education's Public Library Services Branch provides leadership and support to public library authorities and ensures compliance with the *Library Act*.

Library Legislation – An Overview

There are four main types of public libraries permitted under BC's *Library Act*...

1) A municipal library is established by bylaw and is supported primarily by municipal revenues. It is managed by a five to 13 member library board – one member appointed from council and the remainder from among the residents or electors of the municipality. The council-member appointee to a municipal library board is not just a liaison between council and the library, but rather a full member of the board with voting privileges and all the same responsibilities as the other board members. There are 27 municipal libraries in BC – many of these with branch libraries as well.

2) A regional library district is a tax-requisitioning authority established by the Lieutenant Governor in Council at the request, by bylaw, of two or more municipalities and one or more regional districts, each representing one or more electoral participating areas. The library board consists of a representative of each municipality and regional district that is a party to the agreement. There are three regional library districts in BC: the Fraser Valley, the Okanagan, and the Vancouver Island Regional Library Districts.

3) A public library association (PLA) is a form of library permitted to continue under current legislation – no new PLAs can be established. A PLA board consists of between five and nine members, elected by the members of the PLA from among themselves. A local government that provides assistance to the PLA by way of a grant may appoint a representative from council or from among the directors of the participating areas to be a member of the library board. A PLA may request that the municipality or regional district in which the PLA is located assume responsibility for providing library service in the community. There are currently 39 PLAs in BC.

4) An integrated public library system is an organization of regional districts or a regional district that provides and maintains a library system. There are only two such entities in existence: the Cariboo and the Thompson–Nicola Regional District Library Systems. No new integrated public library systems may be established under the *Library Act*.

Two or more library boards may also enter into a written agreement to establish a **library federation**, which is dedicated to the cooperative provision of library service within the region. There are currently six library federations in BC: IslandLink on Vancouver Island, the Kootenay, North Central, North Coast, and North East Library Federations, and Public Library InterLINK in the Greater Vancouver region.

Board/Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Library Board Members

Trustees ensure that the library provides relevant, comprehensive, and efficient service to the community it serves. The board represents the community and sets strategic directions and policies on its behalf, employs a director to implement its plans and priorities, and monitors and evaluates that implementation. The board works closely with its one employee, the director, recognizing and respecting mutual rights and responsibilities and professional expertise. Clear lines of authority, accountability and communication are essential between board and director. Library board members may serve a total of eight consecutive years.

Library Directors

The position of library director or chief librarian is similar to that of chief administrative officer in a local government. The director is essentially the board's only employee, and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the library. He or she advises the board in planning, policy and program development, and ensures that the library operates according to the board's strategic plan, policies and priorities. The director is the interface between the library board and staff, serving as secretary to the board and director of staff.

Further Resources for Library Trustees

- **British Columbia Library Trustees' Association**
(www.bclta.org)
- **Public Library Services Branch**
(www.bced.gov.bc.ca/pls)
- **British Columbia Library Act**
(www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/L/96264_01.htm)

Did You Know?

- Under the *Library Act*, all public libraries must provide free admission and free use of materials onsite. Residents/electors of library service areas must also be permitted to borrow library materials and use reference and information services free of charge. Libraries may charge non-residents/electors for basic services, and may charge all library users for extra services, e.g., Internet access.
- Local governments provide upwards of 80% of library funding; the Province provides about 10%; and the remaining funds come from fundraising efforts, private donations, friends groups, library foundations, etc.
- The Province has launched a review of the *Library Act*, which was last revised in 1994. The first stage of this consultative process is underway and stakeholders may submit briefs to the Province by March 2, 2009.
- Thanks to the province-wide implementation of the OneCard system, you can borrow from and return materials to any public library in BC as long as you have an active library card.
- BC has an electronic library reference service called AskAway (www.askaway.org). Qualified library staff members are available to chat online and answer your questions seven days a week.
- Libraries are committed to intellectual freedom and freedom of expression, including knowledge and intellectual activity which some may consider unconventional or even unacceptable. Library collections contain a wide variety of materials which reflect the diverse interests of the community and facilities are made available to all individuals and groups who need them.

Hot Topics in the Public Library Sector

Library Act Review – the provincial government recently launched the BC *Library Act* legislative review process in an effort to update the Act, which was last revised in 1994. The first stage of this consultative process is now underway. Stakeholders are invited to submit briefs to the Public Library Services Branch by March 2, 2009, on the specific issues or approaches they would like to see addressed during the legislative review.

Infrastructure – public libraries in BC are facing a substantial infrastructure deficit. New library buildings and renovations to existing buildings will be crucial in order to meet the future needs of British Columbians. The BC Library Trustees' Association will be conducting a province-wide library infrastructure needs assessment in 2009 and will be making results available to all local governments.

Shared-use Facilities – the provincial government has been supporting a number of public libraries in their work with local governments, school districts, non-profit associations, etc. to develop shared- or joint-use facilities to better serve their communities. Several such buildings have been established throughout the province, and with the announcement of the provincial "Neighbourhoods of Learning" initiative, this may become a focus for other communities in coming years.

Return on Investment – "Investments in libraries often yield high dividends for communities. Studies show economic returns from salaries and wages paid to staff, construction costs, employment services and library purchases. A recent Pennsylvania study points out that for every dollar invested in the public library, the community receives a return of \$5.50. A similar report from Florida shows a \$6.54 return on investment." (American Library Association) In essence, "public libraries are people magnets and can play an important role in downtown and neighbourhood development." (Prince George Citizen)

Local Government Support – libraries and their many users rely on the informed support of local elected officials and local government staff. It is crucial that *all* councillors, directors, and key staff people keep up-to-date on library issues and happenings – not just the local government representative on the library board. The public library is a key community asset, and knowledge of its operating and capital finances, infrastructure needs, community service capabilities, programming, etc. is a local government responsibility. Visit your local library and get to know it so you can promote it as a core government service provided to the taxpayers and residents of your community.

TILMA – the public library community appreciates the work that the Union of BC Municipalities has undertaken on behalf of local governments regarding the BC-Alberta Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement. The library community is currently investigating the potential impact of TILMA on BC libraries and has requested that the provincial government fully exempt from TILMA all measures related to library and information services.

Copyright Act Amendments – Although Bill C61 died on the order paper with the announcement of the 2008 federal election, it is likely that proposed amendments to Canada's *Copyright Act* will resurface. Any amendments to the Act must strike a proper balance between the rights of copyright holders and the users of copyrighted materials and must not inhibit the library community's ability to provide Canadians with access to all forms of information and resources.

Popularity/Importance of Libraries – Public libraries are going to draw in more and more people than ever in the coming months – helping with employment challenges; providing a safe and welcoming space to read, learn and use the computer; giving language and settlement assistance to new immigrants; and fostering all varieties of literacy. In these challenging economic times, when our services are needed most by British Columbians, we are counting on local and provincial governments to see the value of maintaining, if not increasing, existing library funding and support.