

Public Library Fact Sheet for Use During 2009 Provincial Election Campaign

The Provincial Government is a key partner in ensuring the effectiveness of public libraries in all regions of BC and plays a unique and crucial role in fostering collaboration between libraries. Together, we are making communities stronger and resilient during this recessionary period. With your support, we would like to do even more. We suggest that British Columbia could follow the example of the Alberta and NWT governments. The NWT increased funding for libraries from \$309,000 to \$573,000 and some of the smaller libraries received double their normal funding. Despite severe budget constraints, the government of Alberta announced a 39% increase to library funding in April. This will provide a welcome investment for the future prosperity of all citizens, and places the funds in organizations uniquely positioned in the community to deliver results. BC public libraries will continue to play a crucial role in the recovery of our provincial economy and in insuring the well being of our residents. Your continued support is critical, and we look forward to further engagement regarding the funding levels of public libraries in the province.

In such difficult times, increased provincial funding for public libraries is more important than ever. Here's why: provincial funding delivers concrete results in three strategic areas: *collaboration and innovation among library systems, service delivery and equity of access.*

- *Collaboration and innovation:* Provincial support is crucial for collaboration. Through federations and multi-partner task forces, BC libraries work together to develop efficiencies and strengthen services for their local communities. Notable success stories such as the province-wide AskAway reference service and BC One Card are two examples of delivering effective information to all British Columbians. Municipalities fund local library systems. The provincial government funds creative networks that produce results for the province as a whole.
- *Service delivery:* Provincial investments in technology are critical to library service delivery. The creation of SITKA, an open source product libraries can use to automate transactions and catalogue collections, could not be developed and delivered without provincial library funding. The seed money provided by the province will ensure SITKA becomes self-sustaining through municipal support. It offers an affordable, reliable solution for rural and small public libraries systems that would not be available in the marketplace.
- *Equity of access:* Every member of the BC community has a right to access information, regardless of their geographic location. Provincial funding enables rural and remote communities to benefit from consortia purchasing of database licensing. Together, we can deliver a wealth of free, high-quality material to all areas of the province. The Provincial support for libraries is essential to equalize citizen access to information and service for rural and economically challenged communities.

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While the provincial contribution to public libraries is a small component of the Ministry's budget (1/3 of 1% of total expenditures), this support is *crucial for your constituents across BC*:

- Our mandate is to serve everyone. We offer high-quality and cost-effective programs for preschool children and their caregivers, students, job seekers, employers, immigrants, the marginalized, senior citizens and those with special needs. Our collections are available in multiple formats (e.g. audiobooks, print, e-books, video), in multiple languages and are professionally selected to meet the needs of each community in British Columbia.
- Our services are free. User fees constitute a significant barrier for citizens struggling with economic uncertainty. We have removed this barrier, and we minimize geographic and socio-economic barriers with outreach programs, electronic delivery of information and partnership programs that bring the library directly to individual community members.
- We offer essential public Internet access in the communities we serve. With the equipment, the software, the staff expertise and a wealth of information, we ensure equitable access to all levels of government services, employment and educational opportunities.
- We act as the town square of the community. We offer safe and welcoming environments that are specifically designed for public use. Libraries are places where people and ideas intersect, and public opinions are shaped and informed.

In most cases, more than 80% of BC public library revenue comes from local government and this level of government is experiencing economic challenges which inevitably effects library budgets. With funding already squeezed at the local level, the Provincial contribution typically constitutes more than 10% of library revenue. A loss of these funds would trigger service reductions, layoffs and potential service point closings at a time when demand for service is higher than ever before.

The provincial Library Act requires that core public library services are free. A loss of provincial funding support for libraries would encourage some municipalities to advocate for the removal of this prohibition, which will lead to charging for access to this essential service at time when communities need us most.

We recognize the challenges of the current economic climate, and we commit our continued support to help individual citizens, businesses and organizations throughout these turbulent times. Public libraries have a strong tradition of service, during good times and bad. In fact, when many public libraries were established at the turn of the 20th century, they were described as a place of refuge and a community haven. They continue to be centres of knowledge, literacy, lifelong learning, enjoyment and escape. We are here for the citizens of

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British Columbia when they need us most, and we appreciate your support for the invaluable services offered by the public libraries across the province.