



**Centre for Equitable Library Access  
Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultation in Advance of the 2019 Budget**

Submitted by Michael Ciccone, CELA Executive Director

**Recommendation:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$3 million for the production of alternate format materials to be distributed through public libraries by the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA).

## **About CELA**

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) is a national non-profit organization founded on the principal of publicly-funded support of equitable public library service to Canadians with print disabilities.

The ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty, and the momentum building with the Government of Canada's tabling of Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act, are focusing national attention on accessible services and shining a light on the importance of the service CELA provides to Canadians with print disabilities through Canada's public libraries.

We estimate that by March 31, 2019, CELA patrons will have borrowed over 10 million books and other media in accessible formats offered by CELA through public libraries - a number unimaginable and unattainable if each individual library were responsible for providing the service within their existing capacity.

CELA enjoys support across Canada, receiving funding from the Governments of Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Yukon. We also have an in-kind agreement with Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ). In the two provinces currently not supporting CELA, individual libraries have opted to subscribe to CELA services despite a lack of provincial support. CELA has the full support of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), an organization consisting of public libraries representing communities with populations exceeding 100,000. CELA is funded to serve 96.3% of the Canadian population and plans on serving those residing in areas not funded with an alternative digital service.

This funding, approximately \$1.7 million in the current fiscal year, is sought primarily to acquire source materials for production, facilitate and coordinate production and delivery, maintain the CELA web site, catalogue and digital infrastructure, support subscriptions to additional resources of alternate formatted materials (e.g. Bookshare) and support patron and member libraries at a national level.

## **CELA-CNIB Partnership**

Prior to CELA, the CNIB Library, founded in 1906, had been the predominant supplier of materials for the visually impaired. In 2012, at the request of the Government of Canada, CNIB developed a service model/business plan that proposed a publicly-funded national not-for-profit digital hub, separate from CNIB and would broaden the service to include all print disabilities. Public libraries were the natural distribution network identified.

In 2013, the federal government provided \$2 million in funding for an “incubation” period to help CELA get off the ground. That same year, with funding assistance from CULC member libraries and the CNIB, CELA was federally incorporated.

The CELA model allows CELA staff and member libraries to focus on service provision and support while CNIB, with professional-level recording studios, a network of volunteer audio narrators, a braille production department and general expertise in alternate format production, is contracted to produce books for the CELA collection based on the CELA Collections Policy and curated by the CELA collections team. As part of the service agreement between the two organizations, CNIB also houses and distributes the collection of over 90,000 accessible books. CNIB has been funded primarily by the Government of Canada for this work since CELA’s launch.

Since its launch on April 1, 2014, CELA has solidified its place as a sustainable and necessary public service component of its member libraries. Together CELA and CNIB have determined that CELA is now in position to assume responsibility for the submission of the request for funding for alternate format production and administration of any funding received. We will continue working with CNIB and other organizations to make the vision of equitable public library service a reality.

## **Public Libraries and the Need for CELA**

It is estimated that more than 3 million Canadians have print disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Of these, 33% experience varying degrees of vision loss, 27% have learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, brain injuries) and the remaining 40% have challenges

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<sup>1</sup> <https://goo.gl/d6d9vG>

with dexterity - the ability to handle a book (e.g. arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's)<sup>2</sup>. Yet, approximately 90% of content published today is not available in an accessible format<sup>3</sup>.

To ensure Canada's competitiveness, federal measures need to be enacted so that all Canadians have equal access to opportunities. For Canadians to be productive in any scenario, be it in the workplace, at home, or in cultural or recreational experiences, fundamental rights must be ensured.

The public library is open to everyone and is easily adaptable to the needs of a community. It is an unbiased supplier of information and a trusted community centre that serves as a pillar of a democratic society and a social and economic equalizer. It uses the collective wealth of a community to provide access to a vast collection of tools that few could afford on their own. It is the ultimate public good.

While public libraries provide a breadth of physical and digital collections to their communities, many of the standard formats, discovery tools and reading devices available to access the collection are not suitable for Canadians with print disabilities. Some material available in public library collections - including large print, books on CD, and digital audio books and eBooks - may meet the needs of a portion of Canadians with print disabilities, but the number of titles available in these formats can be minimal, most often not truly accessible, and therefore not equitable substitutes for what many people with print disabilities require.

Many Canadians with print disabilities rely on alternative-format materials for reading. These formats include braille, DAISY audio, and accessible electronic text such as DAISY Text or ePub 3. It is estimated that only 10% of printed material is available in alternative formats. This creates an unfair disadvantage for Canadians who cannot access conventional print.

CELA directly addresses these challenges and opportunities by enabling public libraries to offer an expanding collection of more than 600,000 accessible books in both digital and physical formats. By centralizing acquisitions, partnering with the largest producer of accessible material in Canada (CNIB) and the largest in the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://goo.gl/SnoX2D>

<sup>3</sup> <https://goo.gl/7JZVZy>

United States (Bookshare), CELA has demonstrated the capacity to offer Canadians with print disabilities local access to an equitable library service.

## **Canada's Obligation Under the Marrakesh Treaty and CELA**

In June 2016, Bill C-11, An Act to Amend the Copyright Act, received Royal Assent. Bill C-11 ratified the Marrakesh Treaty which seeks to provide integrated access to international accessible publications. Canada, the 20th ratifying country, pushed the Marrakesh Treaty into international law. As such, Canada now has an obligation to ensure that accessible literature continues to be produced in Canada in both official languages.

For Canada to truly realize the obligations of the Marrakesh Treaty would benefit not only Canadians with print disabilities but also people with disabilities across the world and the Canadian government. For Canadians, the Marrakesh Treaty increases the number of publications available in alternate formats. For readers worldwide, the Marrakesh Treaty potentially offers access to thousands of accessible books published by Canadian authors in both official languages. This action particularly helps those in developing and least developed countries, who are Marrakesh Treaty signatories. For the Government of Canada, implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty shows international leadership in responding to the "book famine".

CELA is already delivering on the promise of the Marrakesh Treaty as the sole Canadian member of the Accessible Books Consortium's Global Book Service. The Service, administered by United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) was designed soon after the Marrakesh Treaty was first signed in 2013. It allows organizations authorized to produce alternative formats from around the world to share files. CELA's collection is currently the most heavily exchanged, with 4,456 titles downloaded by entities in other countries since Marrakesh was ratified – 9 times higher than any other collection available.

## **Working Group on Alternate Format Materials for Canadians with Print Disabilities**

CELA is a proud participant in the Working Group on Alternate Format Materials for Canadians with Print Disabilities which began discussions in the fall of 2017. The group is administered by the Office of Disability Issues, which recently

produced a report on their findings and laid out a 5-year plan - the ultimate goal being the creation of accessible materials at source by the publisher.

CELA applauds the efforts of the Working Group and its end goal. A primary indicator of success will be that CELA's services will no longer be necessary. However, as the report indicates, in the interim, funding is needed to support the production of alternate format materials by organizations such as CELA's production partner, CNIB.

And while the report does well in addressing the issues and suggesting improvements to the production of alternate formats, there are two key aspects of equitable access that should be highlighted.

First, an accessible entry point to the accessible materials is necessary – a tool to discover the content available. In libraries, most catalogues and vendor-produced discovery tools for digital collections are not accessible. That is the impetus behind CELA's new digital platform that will be fully accessible and will combine the CELA collection with that of Bookshare – a US-based database of over 500,000 accessible titles – into one discovery tool for Canadian public libraries and their eligible patrons. The platform will be launched by the beginning of 2019.

Second, an accessible means to read the materials must be available. Again, most applications supplied by libraries and vendors are not accessible. Apps that are specifically for reading books in alternate formats exist and CELA partners with several of the organizations responsible for their development, but many of digital titles available through libraries cannot be read with these apps.

CELA looks forward to the day when equitable library service will be attained through the conventional channels libraries use to support other members of their community. Until then - until the discovery, format and access issues are resolved - CELA will continue to seek support for providing its service to Canadians with print disabilities through its member libraries.

## **Format Choice**

As a service that reflects the values of Canadian public libraries, CELA believes format choice based on the needs of the individual to be an essential component of its commitment to patrons. That choice may be related to the content of the material (for leisure or study) or the specific nature of a person's print disability.

Often physical options are chosen due to a lack of necessary internet access or equipment needed to use digital options, or lack of comfort using online services.

Format choice is also something that was highlighted as important in Working Group's report. CELA's collection is entirely digital, but through its partnership with CNIB, DAISY CDs and embossed braille are provided for those patrons who prefer physical formats. These books are delivered using the Literature for the Blind service offered by Canada Post.

## **Conclusion**

The funds we are seeking from the Government of Canada will continue to support CELA's efforts to provide equitable public library service to Canadians with print disabilities while a more permanent solution is devised by the Working Group or other entities created per the recommendations of the Working Group report. We look forward to discussing our request in further detail.