

## 2017 Pre-Budget Submission

# ESTABLISHING & ENHANCING LIBRARIES WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

*Submitted by:*

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Most Indigenous communities in Canada do not have a public library. We request explicit federal funding to establish and enhance libraries within Indigenous communities. Libraries strengthen opportunities by improving skills, social cohesion and standards of living. We are appealing for the creation of a three-year, \$90m fund to construct libraries, and an additional fund (approximately \$6m/year) for operational costs.

### **BACKGROUND**

More than 500 First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities within Canada do not have access to a public library. Those communities which are lucky enough to have a library often operate on a shoestring budget, housed in inadequate facilities.

The federal government does not currently assist in the establishment of public libraries within Indigenous communities.

Prime Minister Trudeau has made improving Indigenous lives, communities and relations a top priority for his government. He has made historic, large commitments to help Indigenous communities catch-up to other Canadian communities. This anticipated and welcome change in government attitude was a major factor in the historic increase of Indigenous voters in the 42<sup>nd</sup> general election.

### **BUDGET 2016 RELEVANCE**

Budget 2016 expressed the Trudeau government's commitment to improving primary and secondary education outcomes on reserves to facilitate improvements in quality of life. It invested \$969.4m to improve Indigenous schools over five years, and promised \$15m over two years to enhancing the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy. Moreover, and of most relevance to our advocacy, the government committed \$1.2b over five years to invest into social infrastructure in First Nations, Inuit and Northern communities. We submit that a library is fundamental social infrastructure. Building and strengthening existing libraries on reserves will help achieve government objectives in a cost effective manner.

### **RELATION TO MANDATE LETTERS**

Marginalized cultural, racial and economic groups have low literacy rates as a direct result of having fewer choices in jobs, education, housing and other areas of advancement. Children from low-income households are at risk of low literacy and continued poverty<sup>1</sup>. Bleak opportunities and low levels of poverty are also related to poor health. All of these findings are especially true for Indigenous peoples. Prime Minister Trudeau has committed to address and improve these matters during his tenure. Literacy can break the negative cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> "Literacy and Essential Skills Fact Sheet: Libraries." Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012.  
<<http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/02/poverty.pdf>>

Prime Minister Trudeau's 2015 Mandate Letter to the Honourable Doctor Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs), informed her (and Canadians) that his government's mandate was to provide more to those who need it. He also informed Hon. Dr. Bennett, and all Ministers through their mandate letters, that:

*"[n]o relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership."*

Indigenous communities are in desperate need of public libraries and related services. Improving the library movement for indigenous peoples is one easy and cost-effective means to fulfill many of the government's commitments. In particular, the growth of libraries in Indigenous communities can help the Minister deliver on four priorities of her mandate:

- *Make significant new investments in First Nations education to ensure that First Nations children on reserve receive a quality education while respecting the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education.*
  - A quality education is facilitated and heightened through access to current information and technology that libraries provide.
- *Work, in collaboration with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and in consultation with First Nations, Inuit, and other stakeholders, to improve essential physical infrastructure for Indigenous communities including improving housing outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.*
  - Currently, fewer than one in ten reserves have a library. For those communities that do have a library, most are housed in outdated, unsafe or inaccessible facilities. New infrastructure can include libraries. In some cases, existing infrastructure could be refurbished into libraries. In other cases, Band Councils could include libraries in planned development if the necessary expertise is consulted.
- *Work with the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to promote economic development and create jobs for Indigenous Peoples.*
  - Library development will provide skilled work opportunities among the Indigenous population. Libraries can offer space for teaching and learning and provide education materials as well as access to endangered culture and language.
- *Work with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to launch consultations with provinces and territories and Indigenous Peoples on a National Early Learning and Childcare Framework as a first step towards delivering affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care.*
  - Child care and library facilities can be established next to one another, providing easy access to children's activities and learning programs. This is especially important for Indigenous peoples as they share their languages and cultures among their youth.

## **EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ON-RESERVE LIBRARY FUNDING**

Many Canadians assume everyone has equal access to a public library and its services. This is not true for a significant number of Indigenous peoples. Public libraries provide services and benefits to people and communities. These benefits include:

- Skilled trade jobs with the establishment and maintenance of libraries, and steady staff employment
- Programming to grow abilities (i.e. storytelling, technology training, crafts, Aboriginal Head Start)
- Language classes to preserve cultural identity
- A safe environment and community hub to support volunteer initiatives
- Opportunities to meet others

The Canadian Literacy and Learning Network identifies other deliverables<sup>2</sup> that libraries can provide, but libraries cannot provide anything unless they first exist and have the necessary resources they require to deliver results.

Improved outcomes from library prevalence can also include:

- lower poverty rates<sup>3</sup>
- greater personal health<sup>4</sup>
- an improved understanding of, and ability to engage with the legal process<sup>5</sup>
- improved employability and work place satisfaction<sup>6</sup>
- lower incarceration rates among Indigenous peoples – the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network has observed that for every dollar allocated to vocational and basic education for offenders, a 200-300% return on investment can be found<sup>7</sup>.

*An additional anticipated key outcome of libraries among Indigenous communities is a drop in youth suicides among First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities. A publically accessible, safe retreat and learning environment can help to keep youth off the streets and can demonstrate to youth many opportunities for their potential. Literacy practitioners are often skilled at helping learners feel accepted and grow in self-esteem<sup>8</sup>.*

Investment in libraries will not come at a financial loss to the government. A 1% increase in the Canadian literacy rate would generate \$18 billion in economic growth - every year<sup>9</sup>. We believe that rate of return, in proportionate percentage value, would likely be higher among Indigenous communities. Overall, literacy programming has been found to have a 241% return on investment<sup>10</sup>.

Libraries promote literacy. Without any doubt, literacy truly is the foundation of every essential skill<sup>11</sup> and libraries play a primary role in advancing literacy.

### **A TESTED PROVINCIAL PILOT PROJECT: WRITE TO READ**

The Write to Read Project<sup>12</sup> establishes public libraries in British Columbia's Indigenous communities. Our proposal would allow the government to build on their successes nationally.

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<sup>2</sup> "Literacy and Essential Skills Fact Sheet: Libraries." Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012.

<<http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/02/libraries.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, "Fact Sheets", accessed 14 July 2016.

< <http://www.literacy.ca/literacy/les-fact-sheets/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, "Literacy Facts", accessed 14 July 2016.

<<http://www.literacy.ca/literacy/literacy-sub/>>

<sup>8</sup> Harwood, Chris. "The Big Picture: Literacy in Canada." Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, Apr. 2012.

<[http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/05/The-Big-Picture\\_updated-April-2012.pdf](http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/05/The-Big-Picture_updated-April-2012.pdf)>

<sup>9</sup> "Literacy Facts." Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, accessed 14 July 2016.

<<http://www.literacy.ca/literacy/literacy-sub/>>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Harwood, Chris. "The Big Picture: Literacy in Canada." Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, Apr. 2012.

<[http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/05/The-Big-Picture\\_updated-April-2012.pdf](http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/05/The-Big-Picture_updated-April-2012.pdf)>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Library growth within Indigenous communities is a natural extension of Canada's reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples and communities. We have provided a brief overview of some of the evidence that demonstrates that libraries, their services, and higher literacy rates, play a key role in accomplishing many of our government's objectives.

We would like to ask the Ministry of Finance to:

1. Support the Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs with new funding to explicitly support the creation, growth and sustainability of public libraries on First Nation, Inuit, and Metis communities.

Approximately 500 Indigenous communities across Canada have no public library. An *initial* three year commitment from the government to start this reconciliation project could aim to build 10 libraries a year. This achievable goal would create 30 libraries, and as a result, an additional 15% of Indigenous communities would have access to a public library and related services by 2019.

We believe that the average community library would require a \$3m investment from the federal government to see a library established. This would translate into a \$30m/year fund, or \$90m for three years.

2. Write to Read can attest that ongoing operational support will be needed to ensure qualified staff can aid patrons and current materials can be consistently purchased, ensuring that Indigenous peoples are able to keep pace with technology and the education of off-reserve individuals.

We estimate that each Indigenous library would require up to \$100 000/year in operational support from their federal government partners. Currently, there are approximately only 60 libraries across Canada within Indigenous communities. If the government were to begin aiding in the operation of all currently established Indigenous libraries, this would translate into a maximum yearly operating budget fund of \$6m (plus an additional \$1m/y added to this budget if the government is successful in meeting the goal of establishing 10 new libraries a year in Indigenous communities).

The procedure to fulfill this new government initiative could be accomplished through a variety of models. While open to further recommendations, we offer two models as preliminary suggestions:

- Community recipients could be selected by the Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs through a yearly application process.
- Implement the National Reading Campaign's proposal<sup>13</sup> for the creation of the National Aboriginal Library Association (NALA), and include in their mandate and financial means, the selection of communities to receive library infrastructure and operational funds.

We strongly believe that the second option (setting up an autonomous organization accountable to the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs) is more sensible.

The cost of staff and volunteer board to undertake this important initiative would be significantly less than adding this responsibility to the current federal civil service. More importantly working as a partnership between the government and this new organization operated by Indigenous experts in the field would be a deep and strong signal of respect and trust.

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<sup>12</sup> Information regarding the Write to Read Project is found at <http://writetoreadproject.org/>

<sup>13</sup> The National Aboriginal Library Association business proposal is found at: <http://www.nationalreadingcampaign.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/NALA-Final-Report.pdf>

With federal support, further evidence can be tracked and gathered to show that this is a worthy expenditure on the part of the federal government for continued funding - just as it is for provinces funding municipal and county libraries.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICANT: THE NATIONAL READING CAMPAIGN**

Readers, writers, educators, librarians, parents, young people, and book and magazine publishers came together in 2008 to help make Canada a country of readers. This group incorporated as the National Reading Campaign (NRC) in 2012, and is a not-for-profit organization.

Our mission is to make reading a national priority. Our vision is to create, sustain and grow a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to become and remain a lifelong reader.

NRC has recognized that Indigenous peoples have unequal access to appropriate materials that could sustain and grow their unique cultures and make them prepared to take their place within society at large. Our Aboriginal Issues Committee includes representation from First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities. NALA will ensure that the unique needs of various communities will be recognized in its dealings.

For more information visit: <http://www.nationalreadingcampaign.ca>