

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

By: Canadian Urban Libraries Council



August 2020

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Government of Canada ensures access to e-content for Canada's public libraries from multinational publishers.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada consider longer term funding arrangements to ensure municipalities can continue to provide essential services, including those offered by public libraries, while municipal revenues continue to be impacted by the pandemic.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada maintain its commitment to increase broadband access across Canada and seek exemptions for public libraries from broadband providers to ensure digital access to public library services is available for all Canadians.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada consider funding the critical role libraries play in supporting vulnerable populations across Canada.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada ensure adequate funding is provided on an urgent basis to CELA to ensure accessible reading material can be provided to vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada provide immediate support to Canadian publishers and booksellers so that they can continue to publish, promote and sell Canadian content in the Canadian market.

Introduction

Incorporated in 2008, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) works to strengthen public library service in Canada's urban areas. CULC/CBUC members are the 45 largest public library systems in Canada, along with Library and Archives Canada and the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec.

CULC/CBUC is committed to the strengthening of vibrant urban communities through building the capacity of Canada's urban libraries. Our members collectively serve more than 7.5 million active users who annually visit our 622 locations and virtual services. In 2018 we loaned over 200 million items, and had more than 550,000,000 uses in person and online. CULC/CBUC member libraries expended over \$110 million on collections including \$11 million on digital resources. More than 12,000 library workers are employed by CULC/CBUC member libraries.

In excess of 77% of all Canadians are served by a CULC/CBUC member library. The activity in CULC/CBUC libraries comprises more than 80% of Canada's public library activity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on CULC/CBUC's members as they have had to close physical library branches and, when possible, provide reduced service via curbside pickup and online access to available e-content. The closure of public libraries branches has resulted in significant staff reductions and revenue losses.

In response to the pandemic, CULC/CBUC members focussed significant energy on preparing a toolkit for the benefit of public libraries across Canada to ensure they had tools to guide them through the pandemic a key priority. This toolkit¹ provides an outline of how public libraries are preparing and executing reopening while offering services (as noted above) to assist public library users in obtaining content while access to libraries was limited.

Access to E-Content

The pandemic's impact on in-library services has magnified public libraries' need to have increased access to e-content – including both eAudio and eBook content - from multinational publishers. It is worth noting that access to e-content from Canadian publishers continues to be made available to Canada's public libraries.

Multinational publishers (collectively known as the "Big 5" plus Amazon) are limiting Canadian libraries' access to e-content. Even when a publication is made available these multinational publishers make it prohibitively expensive to acquire e-content. For example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book, *A Better Man*, is available to libraries for \$22 in hardcover, for \$60 in eBook, and \$81.50 in eAudio. The \$60 eBook cost allows the book to be checked out electronically 52 times or for 2 years – whichever happens first. A paper edition would be expected to last 3 to 4 years at just over a third of the cost.

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¹ [Toolkit on the Recovery and Reimagined Public Library Services Post COVID-19](#)

During the 2019 federal election campaign, the Prime Minister indicated on Barrie 360 that “people need to be able to access information and we’re always going to support our libraries.”

While Canadian publishers have consistently made e-content available to Canada’s public libraries, multinational publishers continue to place barriers in front of public library users. This occurred even as demand for e-content increased due to Canadians staying at home as a result of the pandemic. This barrier to digital access impacts public library users, including those from vulnerable populations who depend on library resources for vital information.

CULC/CBUC members have been working to find a solution to ensure that Canada’s public libraries and users have access to e-content from multinational publishers – including Canadian content like *A Better Man*. Municipalities and municipal leaders across Canada have indicated their support and have called on the federal government to identify a solution.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada ensures access to e-content for Canada’s public libraries from multinational publishers.

Municipal Support

CULC/CBUC’s members, with few exceptions, are responsible to the municipalities in which they reside. CULC/CBUC fully supported the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) call for direct federal funding to address the unprecedented financial shortfalls being faced by municipalities due to the pandemic.

We fully support the agreement reached by the federal and provincial governments to provide funding to municipalities to meet operational and transit costs over the short term as part of the Safe Restart Agreement. We also agree with the FCM which stated that “This agreement is a promising start at addressing the financial crisis municipalities face in this pandemic.”²

We think it’s important to note that even with this funding, Canada’s municipalities risk further budgetary pressures due to the pandemic’s impact on municipal revenues that are exacerbated by their inability to incur debt. These budgetary pressures will have a profound impact on municipal services – including those provided by public libraries – and this will continue beyond the period covered by the “Safe Restart Agreement.”

Any impact on municipal revenues and the resulting budgetary stress placed upon a municipality has a significant effect on the ability of our public libraries to operate. The funding provided via the “Safe Restart Agreement” will provide needed assistance and we are appreciative of what this can mean for library services but consideration must be given for the longer-term needs of municipalities. Given pandemic impacts on municipal revenue can be expected to have a bearing on municipal revenues over an extended period of time, we ask the Committee and the government to consider a longer-term funding arrangement which would

² [COVID-19: Municipalities react to “Safe Restart Agreement”](#)

help ensure our public libraries' essential services can continue to provide benefits to the communities in which we operate.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada consider longer term funding arrangements to ensure municipalities can continue to provide essential services, including those offered by public libraries, while municipal revenues continue to be impacted by the pandemic.

Broadband

CULC/CBUC supports the government's commitment to "increase high-speed broadband coverage in rural Canada by leading the rollout of existing investments, developing and implementing programming towards further improvements and ensuring that investments by the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial partners and the private sector are coordinated to best prepare rural Canada for success in the digital economy."³

With the increased demand for internet access in urban and rural communities across Canada due to the pandemic, the need to ensure full access to digital tools has never been so evident. For many, including seniors, low-income families, youth, and new Canadians, public libraries are crucial for participation in their communities – from education to searching for jobs, to consuming Canadian cultural materials. Barriers to digital access at public libraries impacts these patrons disproportionately. In addition to supporting investments in broadband access across Canada, CULC/CBUC asks the federal government to ensure public libraries are provided exemptions from broadband providers, like those available in the United States, to ensure essential library services can be digitally accessed throughout the community.

Investing in broadband services across Canada will ensure Canadians have access to the digital tools they require and is fully support by CULC/CBUC members.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada maintain its commitment to increase broadband access across Canada and seek exemptions for public libraries from broadband providers to ensure digital access to public library services is available for all Canadians.

Support for Vulnerable Populations

Aly Veshi, from Toronto Public Library, and Richard Thornley from Edmonton Public Library detailed in *The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations*⁴ how libraries provide essential support for vulnerable populations.

³ [Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter](#)

⁴ [The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations](#)

CULC/CBUC members across the country are reminded daily of the important role the public library plays in these vulnerable populations' lives.

Support includes providing a welcome space and support through computer and internet access, the availability of literacy and employment tools, and assistance from staff trained to find and provide sought-after information.

With physical public library branches closed due to the pandemic, these vulnerable populations have lost this important "safe place" and access to information and tools to provide a path forward. Given the financial pressures faced by municipalities, public libraries are concerned they will not be able to provide the required support to these populations. CULC/CBUC asks the federal government to urgently study and fund the role libraries play in supporting these vulnerable groups.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada considers funding the important role libraries play in providing support to vulnerable populations across Canada.

Centre for Equitable Library Access

CULC/CBUC is a founding partner in the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). CELA is an accessible library service providing books and other materials to Canadians with print disabilities. CELA depends on federal funding to produce accessible reading materials that is otherwise unavailable to vulnerable groups across Canada – including individuals with visual, physical or learning disabilities. Federal funding for 2020 has been delayed due to the pandemic and will lead to significant cuts to service for people with print disabilities this fall if nothing is done. CULC/CBUC asks the government to urgently provide this funding to CELA.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada ensure adequate funding is provided on an urgent basis to CELA to ensure accessible reading material can be provided to vulnerable populations.

Support for Canadian Publishers and Booksellers

CULC/CBUC is supportive of the Minister of Canadian Heritage's mandate to support Canadian content.⁵ As detailed in a recent article by Canadian author Stephen Henighan entitled "How COVID-19 Infected the Publishing Industry", the pandemic is having a profound effect on Canadian publishers and booksellers (both independent and corporate). Due to the pandemic, Canadian booksellers have seen unit sales drop by 27 %.⁶ This has had an enormous impact on the ability of publishers and booksellers to publish, promote and sell Canadian content. CULC/CBUC believes a thriving Canadian society and strong public libraries are closely linked to

⁵ [Minister of Canadian Heritage Mandate Letter](#)

⁶ [How COVID-19 Infected the Publishing Industry](#), *The Walrus*, July 2020

the health of domestic publishers and booksellers and urges the federal government to support the Canadian publishing industry as part of the government's commitment to support Canadian content.

Recommendation 6: That the Government of Canada provide immediate support to Canadian publishers and booksellers so that they can continue to publish, promote and sell Canadian content in the Canadian market.

Conclusion

CULC/CBUC appreciates the opportunity by the Standing Committee on Finance to provide this submission in advance of the next federal budget.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on public libraries. The financial pressures being faced by both municipalities and public libraries puts our ability to provide essential library services at risk.

We are available to respond to any questions Committee members may have.

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