

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

**By the BC Libraries Cooperative on behalf of the  
National Network for Equitable Library Service  
(NNELS)**

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# Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That the government renew funding for fiscal year 2021-22 in the amount of \$1,000,000 to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) to continue to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities delivered through the Canadian public library network.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government commit to multi-year funding of a minimum of \$4,000,000 annually to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) and CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) on a permanent and sustained basis to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities delivered through the Canadian public library network.

**Recommendation 3:** That the government provide funding on an urgent basis to NNELS in Budget 2020 to ensure accessible reading services can be provided to vulnerable populations.

**Recommendation 4:** That the government recognize that the work of NNELS is integral to providing accessible reading services to people with print disabilities in Canada, especially during COVID-19, where people with disabilities are disproportionately affected economically, socially and culturally.

# Submission

Thank you to the federal government for your work in making Canada more accessible and in supporting the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) in empowering libraries to help library users who need to read differently, and in working with publishers toward the goal of increasing the availability of 'born-accessible' books. We thank you for your continued recognition of the value of this work, especially at this difficult time with COVID-19, when there is an even greater need to ensure that Canada's marginalized communities, including people with print disabilities, are able to maintain social connection and ensure equal and timely access to information. We are seeing increased demand for access to NNELS' services during the pandemic, and we have expanded our services to support this increased demand from people across the country.

Together, with our sister organization CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access), we offer critical services for the estimated 3 million people across Canada with print disabilities. On behalf of people with print disabilities in Canada, public libraries across Canada, and the organizations of CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) and NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service), we would like to extend our appreciation for the provision of federal funding for accessible library services in 2019-2020: \$3 million to CELA and \$1 million to NNELS. Because of the current pandemic, there is a greater need than ever to secure funding for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

**Recommendation 1: That the government provide funding for fiscal year 2021/22 in the amount of \$1,000,000 to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) to continue to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities delivered through the Canadian public library network.**

NNELS has received a total of 3 million dollars of federal funding through ESDC (Social Development Partnership Program - Disabilities) over the past 3 years that has allowed NNELS to provide accessible reading services to people across Canada. To date, NNELS has not yet received a continuation of funding for 2020-21, despite multiple letters to Finance Minister Bill Morneau and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Carla Qualtrough. It is imperative that we receive funding for the 2021-22 fiscal year for us to continue to do our essential work.

NNELS' work is integral to the betterment of lives of people with print disabilities particularly during COVID-19. This work includes the following 3 areas:

- 1) Advancing the agenda of accessible publishing to ensure equitable access to information through:
  - the coordination of an annual Accessible Publishing Summit, which could be convened online should that be necessary,
  - developing guidelines and recommendations for integrating accessibility into publisher workflows,
  - providing accessible publishing education, support and awareness,
  - performing content and reading systems accessibility testing, and

- research and development into the creation of software tools to help produce accessible content.
- 2) Building capacity and offering stable quality employment opportunities to people with print disabilities with a view to fostering professional development in the areas of accessibility testing, analysis, software development, and leadership. This has allowed us to:
- train and developing a team of accessibility experts, all who have lived experiences with a diversity of print disabilities and located geographically across Canada
  - offer opportunities for presenting and learning at Canadian and international conferences, including the library community, publishing community, and accessibility community
  - create awareness of the reading needs of people with print disabilities
- 3) Expanding the availability of accessible materials by offering on-demand production of books requested by library users, and growing the collection of books in accessible formats for people with print disabilities in Canada through our network of public libraries. This is done through:
- creating accessible format books on user request
  - establishing purchasing agreements with Canadian and international publishers and distributors
  - working with libraries and volunteers to train narrators in local communities to record audiobooks for people with print disabilities.
  - becoming a member of ABC (Accessible Books Consortium) allowing NNELS to participate in the international exchange of accessible material
  - growing our collection of Braille and print-Braille materials

We ask for continued funding of \$1 million dollars in the year 2021-22 to further the above good work, in the following 8 areas:

1. Develop and expand our publisher education and support project to advise on the creation of 'born-accessible' content.
2. Continue to present at publisher association conferences and other related conferences both in Canada and internationally.
3. Continue to build capacity and hire people with print disabilities to work with publishers, libraries and other stakeholders on improving the accessibility of content and reading systems.
4. Build on the success of our annual Accessible Publishing Summit, and plan for a third summit in 2021.
5. Continue working with local and international partners to benefit English and French publishers in Canada, as well as the international accessible publishing community and related stakeholders.
6. Continue to offer on-demand production of books requested by library users, and grow the collection of books in accessible formats for people with print disabilities in Canada. This includes working with libraries to develop a volunteer audiobook recording programs within their communities.
7. Continue our work with publishers on our simultaneous Braille release program.

8. Do research on and advocate for best approaches for ensuring accessible, equitable and timely access to all material for people with print disabilities in Canada, including how we participate on the international stage via the Marrakesh Treaty.

**Recommendation 2: That the government commit to multi-year funding of a minimum of \$4,000,000 annually to NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service) and CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) on a permanent and sustained basis to support accessible reading for people in Canada with print disabilities delivered through the Canadian public library network.**

It is important that NNELS and CELA have sustained and guaranteed funding so that we continue to empower librarians and library users who need to read differently on an ongoing and continual basis. The services of NNELS and CELA provide a level of access for people with print disabilities that would be unattainable if each individual library were responsible for providing the service within their existing capacity. Just as importantly, the implementation and nurturing of NNELS' and CELA's services in Canada's public libraries has elevated awareness among public library staff of the needs of people with print disabilities in Canada, inspiring an overall improvement in inclusive service and measurable steps towards reducing barriers and enabling our users to have greater participation in their communities.

It is imperative that the government commit to ongoing funding for both NNELS and CELA representing the accessible reading sector, to help support an equitable reading landscape in Canada for people with print disabilities. We are asking for ongoing annual funding in the total amount of \$4 million dollars; \$1 million to NNELS and \$3 million to CELA. This money will go towards ongoing services as itemized below:

NNELS is requesting ongoing \$1 million in federal funding to continue its work in the following areas:

- Advancing the agenda of accessible publishing through the coordination of an annual accessible publishing summit, advising key stakeholders on accessibility, performing accessibility testing, and doing research and development into the creation of software tools;
- Building capacity and offering quality employment opportunities to people with print disabilities with a view to fostering professional development in the areas of accessibility testing, analysis, software development, and leadership;
- Offering on-demand production of books requested by library users, and growing the collection of books in accessible formats for people with print disabilities in Canada through our network of public libraries.

CELA is requesting ongoing \$3 million in federal funding to continue its work in the following areas:

- Increasing accessible format production outputs by partnering with CNIB's Accessible Publishing Department to create thousands of alternate format versions of titles otherwise inaccessible to people with print disabilities;

- Leveraging existing and new collaborations to increase the depth and breadth of the materials available in accessible formats to people with print disabilities through partnerships with public libraries across Canada;
- Offering format choice to patrons by distributing DAISY CDs and embossed Braille on demand.

NNELS and CELA are committed to ensuring that all content purchased and produced with federal funds is made available to all people in Canada with print disabilities. We will continue to support each other and work together through shared content purchasing agreements as well as on other collective initiatives that will support the diverse reading needs of people with print disabilities in Canada.

**Recommendation 3: That the government provide funding on an urgent basis to NNELS in Budget 2020 to ensure accessible reading services can be provided to vulnerable populations.**

NNELS' request for continued funding for 2020-21 for \$1 million has not yet been granted, and our services will shortly be seriously affected in our ability to assist people with print disabilities in this critical time, during a pandemic. The funding for the continuation of NNELS' services is urgently needed in this fiscal year, so that marginalized communities, such as people with print disabilities, are not further affected.

**Recommendation 4: That the government recognize that the work of NNELS is integral to providing accessible reading services to people with print disabilities in Canada, especially during COVID-19, where people with disabilities are disproportionately affected economically, socially and culturally.**

We know that this is an unprecedented period both for our country and the global community, and the NNELS team will do its part to continue to increase access to reading materials for people with print disabilities in Canada. We appreciate your support and your continued funding to support an equitable reading landscape for people with print disabilities in Canada.

NNELS has already modified and expanded our services during COVID-19 to meet the demand of our readers with print disabilities. Our team of accessibility testers have identified the need to make COVID-19 information more accessible and we are providing this information in alternative accessible formats such as text descriptions and sonifications (audio versions of graphs) by producing some key charts/graphs and linking to other resources with accessible information.

Our growing collection of books continues to be used in high demand with an increase of usage during COVID-19. It is essential that we are able to continue to provide a quality collection to people with print disabilities in Canada.

## Conclusion

We look forward to partnering with the Government of Canada, libraries, organizations supporting people with print disabilities, publishers, vendors, users, and others in continuing our pursuit of creating an equitable reading landscape in Canada. We thank you for your continued recognition and support of the need for accessible reading and library services.

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