

## Canadian Public Library Accessible Formats Initiative

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) has been working with CNIB since June 2012 to envision a new national organization, removed from CNIB, which builds on the national digital hub model originally proposed by CNIB – whose focus is the creation, collection, distribution, and preservation of alternative format works for Canadians living with print disabilities. The collections and services of the new organization will be available to Canadians through their public libraries.

This service builds on the extensive publicly supported infrastructure created by the CNIB and the service expertise and priorities of local public libraries. It is a community-based solution created by public libraries for public libraries, in partnership with CNIB.

We plan for the service to be available to all Canadian public libraries for subscription as soon as the first quarter of 2014.

### Does the new organization support all public libraries?

The new organization is open to public libraries of all sizes and their users. Special consideration has been given to the resource restraints of smaller Canadian libraries.

While the large libraries have greater capacity to work on initiatives like this, we are all public librarians who are committed to ensuring a strong network of public libraries across all regions of Canada and are committed to equity of access for all Canadians, not just those living in urban regions.

### Who is eligible to access the collections of this new organization?

Canadians with print disabilities are eligible to use this service through their public library membership or membership with a First Nations library service. This includes Canadians

- who are Blind or living with low vision
- who are living with dyslexia or a learning disability
- who are living with a physical disability that makes reading difficult.

### How big is the collection that users can borrow?

On day one, 177,000 alternative format titles are available to users in a variety of accessible formats. The collection will grow rapidly from there through the investment of member libraries as well as public and private sector funding support.

### What formats are available and how can users access them?

Community members have choices in how they want to read:

- Digital narrated audio
- Digital text-to-speech
- Print and/or e-braille

Community members can have materials delivered in three ways:

- directly to electronic device (download),
- through their library branch if CD or braille, and
- mail to their home if CD or braille.

People with print disabilities in a community only have to register with their local public library to be eligible for this service.

### **Who oversees this new library organization?**

The new organization will be governed by a Board made up of representatives from public libraries, funders, and end-users. End-user representation is critical to governance.

### **How will the collection grow?**

The new organization produces and acquires alternative format versions of published materials through in-kind contributions from member libraries as well as direct investment in collection building. These activities include voice recording, EPUB3 mark-up of digital texts, DAISY audio and braille production.

### **Can libraries have physical copies of alternative format materials from the new organization in their branches?**

Libraries have a very low-cost option to build local physical collections. Their users have access to the new organization's collection through the local library's catalogue and borrowing (inter-library loan) from the national collection is free of charge.

### **Is there a test phase?**

No. The system is already in production at CNIB serving tens of thousands of Canadians across the country and is already scaled to serve 1 million users. We would like to acknowledge the Government of Canada for its financial support of the development of the technology infrastructure and accessible collections, which provide a strong foundation for the services of the new organization. We are pleased to be a part of a solution that ensures this investment continues to serve Canadians.

### **Can we have access now if the service is in production already?**

Public libraries and their users in Ontario, New Brunswick, and Alberta, as well as CNIB members already have access to this resource. For the remainder of the country, we need to work on transferring ownership of assets from CNIB to this new organization, finalize the role of partners, transition staff, create the subscription agreements, and develop service level agreements. This will take a few months to accomplish.

### **Who created this solution?**

This was a community-based solution created by public libraries for public libraries and their communities, working in partnership with CNIB, who want to see responsibility for the service transferred to the public library sector. We are delighted that the Federal Government and the provincial governments of Ontario and New Brunswick have allocated funding to CNIB this year to allow it to continue to deliver library service through the current structure and to ready its systems for this next Phase when the operations move to the governance of a new national organization.

### **How will public libraries pay for this?**

Public libraries subscribe to the new organization by becoming members. Membership in this organization is just like subscribing to a journal database or another subscription service. We see it as a collection acquisition expenditure. Over time, as technology improves and more people transition to digital formats, costs to produce and distribute alternative format versions of published material will diminish.

### **Are there cheaper solutions?**

There is no comparable solution in Canada or proposed for Canada. This new organization produces and acquires published works in multiple alternative formats and distributes them across the country in the format of choice to public library users of the service. It also manages a digital repository and collection archive, and supports public libraries with deposit collections, training in accessible service delivery, marketing and community outreach. We want to be sure our community members have a wide range of titles to choose from, in the formats they prefer, and delivered in the way that they prefer.

### **What is CNIB's role going forward?**

CNIB will participate as a private sector funder and will provide downstream services to the new organization, provided they are cost competitive. As well, CNIB will continue to leverage its leadership roles in international initiatives to increase the availability of alternative format materials available to Canadians with print disabilities.

### **How does this fit with the PTPLC/NNELS initiative?**

Public library representatives will be meeting with the Provincial and Territorial Public Librarians Council (PTPLC) on May 30th at CLA to see how the NNELS initiative and our own public library created solution can come together to provide a unified national solution.

### **More Information:**

CULC/CBUC will continue to work on this project and will keep the broader community updated through their website at [www.culc.ca/advocacy](http://www.culc.ca/advocacy).

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