

**Written Submission for Finance Canada's
Pre-Budget Consultations
in Advance of the 2022 Federal Budget**

By: Canadian Urban Libraries Council



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List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada introduce legislation to ensure that Canada's public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities in communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries performing these critical services.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada establish an Equitable Access to Reading Fund which would be focussed on ensuring the print disability community across Canada have access to reading material in multiple accessible formats and that the fund contributes to their ability to fully participate in learning, work and community life.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada restore ongoing sustained funding in Budget 2022 for the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS) to support an equitable reading landscape in Canada for people with print disabilities and to ensure that inclusive reading options exist across Canada.

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 8 million active users who annually visit our 640 locations and virtual services. In 2019 we loaned over 200 million items, and had more than 560 million 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.

CULC/CBUC is committed to working with the federal government to ensure a successful restart for Canada's Arts and Cultural Sector. Given the significant role libraries across Canada have in delivering and providing access to Arts and Cultural materials, CULC/CBUC has an important perspective on the impacts of the pandemic on the sector and the need to ensure a successful restart.

Access to E-Content

An important aspect of a successful restart is ensuring Canadians have reasonable access to arts and cultural materials through Canadian libraries. 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.

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.

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.

Libraries in the United States have experienced similar problems and legislation was recently passed in both New York and Maryland state legislatures to ensure library access to e-content. Similar legislation is being considered in other U.S. jurisdictions. Both the New York and The Maryland laws “require “publishers who offer to license e-books to the public” to also offer those e-books to libraries on “reasonable” terms. The bill’s summary states that the law is designed to ensure that “widely accepted and effective industry practices remain in place while prohibiting harmful practices that discriminate against libraries and harm library patrons.”¹

CULC/CBUC members believe that the federal government, via the Minister of Canadian Heritage, should introduce legislation, similar to the New York and Maryland statutes, to ensure that Canada’s public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada introduce legislation to ensure that Canada’s public libraries and users have access on reasonable terms to e-content from multinational publishers.

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*² how libraries provide essential support for vulnerable populations.

CULC/CBUC members across the country are reminded daily of the important role the public library plays in these vulnerable populations’ lives. Many of these services libraries provide to their communities align with federal priorities and policy initiatives and are integral to communities as they recover from the pandemic.

Support provided by our public libraries 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. Groups that benefit from these services include those seeking employment skills training, new Canadians seeking access to settlement resources and tools in their native language, the homeless and those requiring housing assistance, youth at risk seeking educational support as well Indigenous community members and official language minorities.

¹ <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/86637-new-york-legislature-passes-library-e-book-bill.html>

² [The Role of Public Libraries as Partners in Serving Vulnerable Populations](#)

Increasingly libraries are expanding their services to meet the needs of these vulnerable groups and find themselves needing to take their services directly to the community and, oftentimes, beyond the physical limitations of the library space. To meet these needs to our communities and to vulnerable populations libraries must now ensure staffing requirements can address the wide range of services being provided. Not surprisingly this requires funding support.

Each of the group's libraries are providing needed services to are significant priority groups for the federal government. It is therefore incumbent upon the federal government to recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities to vulnerable communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries performing these critical services.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada recognize the role public libraries are playing in delivering on federal priorities in communities across Canada and provide funding to further support libraries in performing these critical services.

Centre for Equitable Library Access

CULC/CBUC is a founding partner in the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). Both CELA and the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS), are national not-for-profit organizations that provide accessible reading services to the approximately 3 million people across Canada with print disabilities.

CELA and NNELS depend on federal funding to produce accessible reading materials that are otherwise unavailable to vulnerable groups across Canada – including individuals with visual, physical or learning disabilities.

CELA and NNELS offer a critical and necessary public service to ensure equitable access to reading for those people across Canada with print disabilities. Print disabilities encompass those who are blind or visually impaired, people with cognitive disabilities such as dyslexia and those with physical disabilities that make it difficult to read a physical book. The services provided by CELA and NNELS ensure that people with print disabilities across the country are more able to fully participate in their community and contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development and success of their local communities and Canada as a whole.

The 2020 Fall Economic Statement announced that funding for CELA and NNELS would be reduced by 25 per cent per year until it is completely eliminated in 2024-2025. In March 2021, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, announced that funding for 2021-2022 would be restored.

Building on commitments made during the 2021 federal election, the mandate letter for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Issues calls on the Minister to

prioritize the government’s ‘commitment to permanently fund support services that ensure equitable access to reading and other published works for Canadians with print disabilities.’

CULC/CBUC support calls made by CELA and NNELS for the federal government to establish a dedicated fund to support issues of equitable access to reading materials which should be known as the Equitable Access to Reading Fund. This dedicated fund should be adequately funded and be focussed on the needs of people with print disabilities across Canada. The fund should ensure this community has access to reading material in multiple accessible formats and that it contributes to their ability to fully participate in learning, work and community life.

An industry led solution to providing accessible reading materials will not satisfy the demand of those requiring accessible reading products. Until permanent funding can be provided, we call on the federal government to fully restore funding for CELA and NNELS to its previous levels so that their important work in providing assessable reading materials can continue.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada establish an Equitable Access to Reading Fund which would be focussed on ensuring people with print disabilities across Canada have access to reading material in multiple accessible formats and that the fund contributes to their ability to fully participate in learning, work and community life.

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Conclusion

CULC/CBUC appreciates the opportunity 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 Finance Canada officials may have.

For further information please contact Jefferson Gilbert, Executive Director of CULC/CBUC at jgilbert@culc.ca.