

Brief to the Honourable Ken Krawetz, Minister of Education
Library Human Resource & Capital Funding Strategy for the Budget 2010
Saskatchewan Library Trustees Association
November 2009

Introduction

The Saskatchewan Library Trustees Association (SLTA) is a voluntary association of library trustees from across the province that have joined together in their dedication to help provide library services that will meet the needs of Saskatchewan people and thereby improve their quality of life. SLTA was established in 1967, made its first annual brief to the Minister in 1968, and was incorporated under provincial law in 1969. A brief chronological account of public library development in Saskatchewan is attached as Appendix A.

SLTA represents 2,500 trustees who represent public libraries throughout Saskatchewan, in northern hamlets, rural communities, as well as in towns and cities. All persons in Saskatchewan may access the information in these libraries, in whatever media they are provided, without a user fee.

Municipal public libraries exist in Regina and Saskatoon. The seven regional library systems in southern Saskatchewan are Chinook, Lakeland, Palliser, Parkland, Southeast, Wapiti and Wheatland. The northern part of the province is served by the Paskisimom Nuyeh?áh Library.

The Provincial Library is a vital component in the province's library system. The SLTA recognizes the province's support of the Provincial Library as an additional investment in Saskatchewan Libraries that provides key expertise, advice, support and coordination of many of the cooperative initiatives in which libraries are involved. The SLTA recognizes, in particular, the contribution of the Provincial Library to the success of the recent Government and Public Libraries Forum held in October 2009.

Summary

The SLTA is committed to further analysis of the role that public libraries can play in fulfilling the strategies and goals of not only the Education Ministry, but many others including Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, Municipal Affairs, Health, First Nations and Métis Relations and Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport, to name a few.

Library staff and trustees are excited by the possibilities created through the implementation of the Saskatchewan Integrated Library System (SILS). Funding of \$5.2 million from your government was instrumental in moving this project ahead to the implementation stage. The first of our systems are set to launch on the new platform in December 2009. As you can imagine, staff have dedicated an immense amount of time and energy to ensure that the project proceeds in a timely fashion. The resulting benefit to Saskatchewan residents will be

the ability to search collections of information from across the library sector in Saskatchewan, and not only within their own system. Availability of these expanded information resources will benefit all users of the library system. With this added service, maintenance of the Canada Post book rate is of the utmost importance, and the SLTA will be addressing this with both the Federal Government and Canada Post, through its advocacy activities. Provincial support for this book rate is strongly encouraged.

Issue

With the advent of the Saskatchewan Integrated Library Systems project, we cannot stress enough the important role that our public library employees have contributed in its implementation and ultimate success. Regional Libraries operations and services continue to be stretched for a myriad of reasons including SILS implementation requirements, high levels of staff turnover, retiring work force, difficulty in attracting qualified individuals and below-average compensation levels. A Standards for Staffing Levels and Compensation Committee conducted a salary scan of public library salaries in the summer of 2009 and we understand that a report of their findings was presented to Deputy Assistant Minister McKee in September. A copy of the committee's findings is attached to this brief.

As confirmed through the report from the Standards for Staffing Levels and Compensation Committee, there are serious wage shortcomings present in the library system, which have inflicted damage to the profession and mission of public library services. Understaffing and extended vacancies at senior levels have retarded the ability to attract, retain and receive any long-term benefits from new professionals and experienced library staff.

One reality facing regional directors is the reduction of service hours in order to redirect dollars to the minimal staff wage increases that have occurred. A large percentage of the workforce is approaching retirement and positions will be difficult to fill with qualified candidates at the current salary levels. While Saskatchewan provides an attractive package of quality of life benefits, a new generation of work force is seeking employment that pays accordingly for the education and experience that they bring with them.

Background

Public libraries contribute to our government's goals of social and economic growth and security. We are grateful for the opportunity provided through the Government and Libraries Forum held on October 19 & 20, 2009. This Forum has opened the possibility of forging new partnerships with government ministries beyond Education. We believe that since public libraries are grass roots, local organizations, we can use libraries in innovative ways to help other government ministries achieve their mandates, while sharing costs across involved ministries. Libraries must be recognized as more than strictly information providers.

The SLTA and its members look forward to continued open dialogue with government representatives to further explore the common ground on which partnerships can be built. Discussions at the Forum around key issues of Community Economic Development, Literacy, First Nations & Métis Success, Rural Services and Immigration brought to light a number of common themes including communication and partnerships. It is only through open communication and partnership building that both the goals of government and the library sector can be met.

Responsibility for the library sector falls under the Ministry of Education, but has far-reaching effects in a number of other Ministries including Advanced Education, Employment & Labour, Municipal Affairs and Tourism, Sports and Culture, to name a few. The relationship between libraries and various Ministries is an interdependent one.

Rationale

In the broad scope of government services, perhaps only health care reaches more citizens than public libraries. The recent economic recession has once again brought to the forefront, the importance of libraries. Public libraries provide service to our residents without user fees.

Public libraries have become the hub of the Saskatchewan communities they reside in, numbering over 300.

As new immigrants move to both our rural and urban communities, libraries are serving as a natural point of contact to assist them with language services and employment information, and provide a welcoming environment to obtain information they need. First Nations and Métis success is being addressed through development of a representative library workforce and provision of library services through our northern system Pahkisimon Nuye?áh. The 3rd Annual Round Dance will be hosted by Southeast Regional Library in 2010, and continues to build on the success of the previous Round Dances, in an effort to bring library people together in the spirit of the First Nations and Métis cultures. Community Economic Development is helping to position libraries as the hub of many communities by partnering libraries with various community groups to provide services to local residents ranging from early childhood learning to computer training for seniors, to providing business development and entrepreneurship resources. Literacy and lifelong learning strategies include children's story time initiatives, serving as locations for ESL training and providing internet access for adults to access online training opportunities while remaining in their own community. Many of Saskatchewan's new residents are moving to small communities throughout the province and are using the services of our rural branches.

Libraries are essential to the continued success and growth of Saskatchewan.

Recommendation

Based on the rationale and issues identified in this brief, the SLTA is providing this recommendation to the Government of Saskatchewan through the Ministry of Education:

- 1) Increase provincial government funding to the regional library systems to enable salary adjustments that will recognize position education and experience at competitive levels to improve retention and recruitment strategies.
- 2) Establish a provincial fund for library infrastructure programs that will provide regional systems with assistance in maintaining regional and branch facilities and technological capital requirements.
- 3) Investigate and implement strategies that will further advance the public library system in Saskatchewan, as identified through the Government & Libraries Forum, in partnership with Provincial Library, all library systems, the SLTA and Saskatchewan Libraries Association.
- 4) The Provincial Government, in partnership with the SLTA and SLA, must advocate for maintenance of the Canada Post book rate to both Canada Post and the Federal Government.

Contact

For further information, contact SLTA President, Councillor Bev Dubois at 306-652-2576, or SLTA Executive Director, Wendy Thienes at 306-297-6368.