



**SASKATCHEWAN
LIBRARY
TRUSTEES'
ASSOCIATION**

**BRIEF
TO
HONOURABLE DON MORGAN
2014**

**An Investment with Dividends for
Saskatchewan**

***Libraries are a Gift to the People That
Lasts for a Lifetime***

Introduction

Saskatchewan residents who believe in the promise of the modern library express gratitude and thanks to Minister Morgan and the Provincial Government for the opportunity to put forward our recommendations for the future of libraries in the Province of Saskatchewan.

We are aware that the Minister is a supporter of libraries. We also know he is interested, well informed, and recognizes the purpose of this brief.

We would like to thank, again, Minister Morgan for taking the time to meet with us in June for what turned out to be an extremely productive meeting.

Background

Libraries are easy to sell. They sell themselves, as evidenced by the current trend toward increased use and activity in our libraries in Saskatchewan. Libraries are a proven quantity. They have existed for hundreds of years. Our libraries turn no one away, and today libraries in many cities are referred to as “the living room of the community”.

Beautiful libraries reflect the public image of their province. To quote Winston Churchill, “We shape our buildings and after that, they shape us”. When a city, province, or country portrays a message of brilliance, knowledge, and promise they attract the same. It is virtually impossible and economically impractical to try to buy that type of good news about a city or province.

Saskatchewan has been fondly referred to as “next year country”. It is time to change that. Library people believe we have the will, the power, and the possibility to change that. We believe with the proper investment we can build a situation and environment to turn Saskatchewan into “right now country”.

We are aware that we now have the “perfect storm” in Saskatchewan. The storm is comprised of two parts:

1. The first was recorded in the Conference Board of Canada’s report card which stated, “Saskatchewan gets a dismal D when it comes to education and skills”.ⁱ Michelle Parkouda, a senior research associate, reports in the Leader Post article of June 28th, 2014 that “Overall, Saskatchewan is not doing well. Saskatchewan needs to up its game in the education front”.ⁱⁱ
2. The second is Saskatchewan’s once envied regional library system is antiquated, underfunded, understaffed, and unable to provide a 21st century library service to the people of rural Saskatchewan. Urban libraries are not built to provide a 21st century library service and are struggling to keep up with the modern world.

We believe we are capable of doing something about these conditions.

Services in Concert with the Saskatchewan Government's Plan for the Future

1. Literacy has always been a forte of libraries. We believe that an investment in our libraries with a new modern direction will add to the efforts the Province is taking to reach its goals of literacy, and First Nation high school graduates.
2. Libraries provide aid to people who need English as a second language, including the skills to help them find initial employment.
3. Libraries provide an essential service to those who wish to improve and cannot afford the resources to start on a program.
4. Libraries are a valuable resource for First Nation people in every part of the province; providing a safe and nurturing environment when school is out.
5. Libraries provide access to technology for those who do not have equipment or connectivity.

These are but just a few examples of the range of services libraries provide for Saskatchewan residents.

Challenges

A recent study of libraries in Saskatchewan by Noah S. Wernikowski, Communications Consultant for the SLTA, reported the following:

1. **Libraries are widely supported.** Over 50% of people in Saskatchewan have a valid library card.
2. **Libraries are not a point of contention.** Public libraries are assumed to be a part of the fabric of life. People don't think much about libraries until they are threatened.
3. **Libraries are changing.** Public libraries are a valuable asset, providing the technology that our people need. There is a steady transition to the new library using technology.
4. **Libraries have strained finances.** According to the Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, Provincial Grants to libraries increased by 21.9% between 1991 and 2009. This increase includes increases associated with funding special projects, so the general increase in operating grants given by the provincial government is indeed lower than 21.9%. During this same period, the Saskatchewan Consumer Price Index increased by 46.3%.ⁱⁱⁱ These trends have continued until the present. To help offset the funding shortfall, municipal contributions through levies and mill rates have increased, but not to the extent capable of relieving this pressure. The current funding received makes it difficult to maintain the quality of service offered while modernizing, and has led to staff reduction in the past to balance budgets.

Municipal grants fund municipal libraries and not regional headquarters. Because regional headquarters rely solely on provincial grants for their operational budget, work performed thereat is under increased financial pressure.^{iv}

5. **This underfunding strikes at the very heart of the provincial regional library system.** Just as the weakest link makes a strong chain useless. The large investment in the SILS program becomes

wasted as our regions, because of the noted underfunding, are not able to provide an attractive, staffed, fully functioning branch.

6. **Our regional public library system has always been an example of the “Saskatchewan Way”.** This is collaboration and cooperation between the Province and municipalities. The financial data plainly demonstrates one of the partners is absent and unaccounted for.
7. **The most egregious product of underfunding is the steadily decreasing equal access to resources.** This is especially counterproductive because it takes away a resource that can aid people reach self-dependence.

Recommendations

On behalf of the library system of Saskatchewan, we respectfully request the Government of Saskatchewan to consider our plan for growth and development.

1. We request the cost of living plus a 2% increase for all libraries.
2. We request the Provincial Government assume full responsibility for the cost of SILS.

Note: Funding libraries adequately is a relatively small investment in comparison to funding much larger organizations. The potential gain from library investment will have a substantial impact on Saskatchewan.

With Gratitude

The SLTA appreciates the opportunity to present this brief. We thank Minister Morgan for his efforts and the results we know he will achieve.

ⁱ Conference Board of Canada (2014)

ⁱⁱ Michelle Parkouda (2014)

ⁱⁱⁱ Alan Johnston, Southeast Regional Library. (2009). *Changes in Municipal and Provincial Grants to Saskatchewan Regional Library Systems (1991 – 2009) with Saskatchewan Consumer Price Index (CPI)* [Graph].

^{iv} Noah Wernikowski (2014).