



**SASKATCHEWAN  
LIBRARY  
TRUSTEES'  
ASSOCIATION**

**BRIEF  
TO  
HONOURABLE DON  
MORGAN  
2016**

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**A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life.**

- Henry Ward Beecher

## **Introduction**

The Saskatchewan Library Trustees' Association (SLTA) extends its gratitude to the Government of Saskatchewan for the opportunity to prepare and present this Minister's Brief. As in past briefs, we once again take this opportunity to relay the value of libraries to the people of Saskatchewan.

As the Minister is aware, there are over 300 public libraries located throughout Saskatchewan. User access is free. Resource-sharing and cooperation are the fundamental strengths of Saskatchewan's "one province" library system. In the digital era libraries are as vital as ever to our society. Our libraries require additional resources to meet the wide variety of and growing services they are expected to deliver.

## **Our Libraries Matter Because...**

- **Our libraries matter because they offer an excellent value for the taxpayer's dollar.** A family that makes even modest use of our library services (books, DVDs, eBooks, programs, digital materials, etc.) uses an estimated \$1100 worth of resources per year.
- **Our libraries matter because they help the government succeed.** Our libraries provide an established and trusted network of local institutions that can deliver government programs and services to new, remote and/or marginalized populations.
- **Our libraries matter because they build communities.** Our libraries bring people together physically and online.
- **Our libraries matter because they strengthen families.** Our libraries offer a safe, comfortable and welcoming space for families to learn, grow and play together.
- **Our libraries matter because they get busier during economic downturns.** During economic downturns people turn to our libraries for an affordable outing with children, for free access to recreational materials like books and DVDs, free internet and computer access, inexpensive printing and faxing services and job seeking assistance.
- **Our libraries matter because they are equalizers – libraries serve people of all ages, persuasions, genders, ethnicities, physical abilities, income levels, educational levels and more.**
- **Our libraries matter because they serve rural and remote communities.** Our libraries maintain a presence in many rural and remote communities in the form of weekly delivery of new materials, a full service branch, or a community drop off point.
- **Our libraries matter because they protect our right to know.** Our libraries defend our rights to learn, grow, speak freely, be educated and seek information.

- **Our libraries matter because they empower the individual.** Our libraries offer instruction, support and access to resources to help people lead better lives.
- **Our libraries matter because they strengthen our province and our country.** Through resources and programming libraries support and defend a citizenry that is literate, informed and democratic.
- **Our libraries matter because they preserve Saskatchewan’s cultural heritage.** Our libraries collect, organize and make available unique and historical documents that helps us to better understand our past, present and future.
- **Our libraries matter because they provide direct economic benefits to the local community.** Our libraries provide funding for operations, materials and especially wages that provide direct benefit to the economy. Our libraries support and compliment the local economy, bolster the economic prosperity of the community and provide jobs in an automated and community focused environment.
- **Our libraries matter because they attract newcomers to our communities.** The number one consideration for a person moving to rural Saskatchewan is the number of amenities in town. Our libraries directly contribute toward the services offered in our communities.
- **Our libraries matter because they are well used.** There are 100 million library visits per year in Canada. There are 112 million movie goers each year in Canada. There are 4.8 million NHL hockey game attendees each year in Canada.
- **Our libraries matter because they are one of the last free public spaces.** Our libraries offer one of the last free public spaces where people can simply “be” year round. Visitors to our libraries can socialize, meet friends, make new friends, have a discussion, read the paper, access free Wi-Fi, find relief from the heat or cold, or simply “hang out” for as long as the library is open with no expectation to purchase, donate or contribute to anything.
- **Our libraries matter because they support literacy and lifelong learning.** Our libraries are rooted in the democratic right of all citizens to have equal access to recorded knowledge and creative expression. Libraries are for access to information. Our libraries connect people to the internet, distance education and a wide variety of audiovisual materials. Our libraries respond to community needs and are an integral part of Saskatchewan’s investment toward a fully literate society.

Our libraries are for lifelong reading and lifelong learning. Our libraries build positive reading experiences knowing that reading purely for the sake of enjoyment is the most powerful tool for literacy development. Research has shown that the quality of libraries directly correlates to the test scores and literacy rates among students. Libraries are vital tools in the challenge to educate and encourage a fully literate Saskatchewan society.

Statistics Canada reports that millions of Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to keep pace with the escalating demands of society and the economy. **There are 42% of Canadian adults between the ages of 16 and 65 who have low literacy skills.** Impoverished adults often do not have the literacy skills required to get into job training programs. They may need literacy skills upgrading before they can succeed in training programs but only about 5-10% of eligible adults enroll in programs. Less than 20% of people with the lowest literacy skills are employed. **A 1% increase in the literacy rate would generate \$18 billion in economic growth every year. Investment in literacy programming has a 241% return on investment.**

### **Conclusion**

The Minister has asked us in previous meetings to find supporters of the public library system in Saskatchewan. SLTA has collected, and submitted to the Minister, over 3,500 comment cards from the people of Saskatchewan. These cards show just how strong support for libraries is across the province, especially in rural areas with few public services.

In addition to the estimated 10,000 immigrants Saskatchewan accepts annually through the Provincial Nominee Program, Saskatchewan is preparing to accept a number of Syrian refugees within the next six months. Government support for our libraries as a vital settlement service will be drastically needed. The refugees have had no opportunity to prepare for life in Canada. Our libraries are uniquely positioned to offer a wide variety of settlement resources - from ESL programming, to job training to computer access. Ensuring that our libraries have the materials and funding they need has the potential to go a long way in successfully integrating refugees into Saskatchewan life.

**Yes! Clearly our libraries matter and the support for our libraries is strong.** The people of Saskatchewan know the importance of libraries and will react positively to anyone who provides the libraries in Saskatchewan the life support that is so drastically needed.

### **Recommendations**

The Government of Saskatchewan has focused its efforts on supporting the public library resource sharing infrastructure through the funding of headquarter operations at all ten library systems. Included in this infrastructure support is funding for shared resources, a province wide courier network, and the Saskatchewan Information and Library Services (SILS). SILS has successfully become the platform for public library services that are delivered throughout the province. Provincial funding assisted in the launch and continued operation of SILS.

SLTA respectfully request the Provincial Government to consider the following:

- We request the Provincial Government provide a minimum of 1.2 million dollars annually to operate SILS and that the Government assume full responsibility for SILS, which would allow library systems to allocate more money into their programming.

## **With Gratitude**

The SLTA appreciates the opportunity to present this brief. We thank Minister Morgan for his efforts.

## References

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