

Report of Saskatchewan Public Libraries Engagement



Introduction

The Process

In the fall of 2018, the Government of Saskatchewan completed a series of engagement sessions with representatives from the public library systems and stakeholders. This was a commitment made in 2017 and the purpose of these engagement sessions was to hear from the library stakeholders and get their perspective on a number of topics.

Terry Dennis, the MLA for Canora-Pelly, was appointed as the Legislative Secretary to the Minister of Education and was asked by Minister Wyant to chair a panel to engage with library stakeholders. The panel included:

- Kim Hebig, the Library Director from Wheatland Regional Library;
- Jeff Barber, Library Director and CEO from Regina Public Library; and,
- Alison Hopkins, Provincial Librarian/ Executive Director of the Provincial Library and Literacy office of the Ministry of Education.

This panel held a series of discussions with public library systems and key stakeholders from September to December 2018. After the meetings, the organizations were invited to submit written submissions. The Minister also invited a number of organizations representing indigenous residents to participate. A full list of the engagement sessions including written submissions are included in Appendix A.

In order to help guide the discussions with the sector, the panel developed a list of questions that was distributed to stakeholders in advance. The questions can be found in Appendix B.

The panel listened to the stakeholders with no preconceived outcomes. They saw the discussions as an opportunity to listen to the experiences, dig deeper into the current state and explore possibilities for the future of public libraries in Saskatchewan. The discussion covered legislation, governance, role clarity and responsibilities, the impact of fiscal pressures, and the future of public libraries.

Mr. Dennis was asked to develop a theme report for the Minister based on these engagements. Submitted to the Minister of Education in January 2019, this report highlights eight common themes expressed in those discussions and submissions. This is a starting point for discussion with both the public library sector and stakeholders, and the residents of Saskatchewan.

What the Panel learned

The panel heard thoughtful and well considered responses to the provided questions, as well as on other topics of interest to stakeholders. Many of the library systems asked and received feedback from their systems and developed responses that represented more than the people that the panel met with. Library systems were represented by senior staff and library trustees. Other stakeholders were represented by some of their members that play a senior role and staff.

Repeatedly, the panel heard common themes that are already well known in Saskatchewan - that public libraries are more than books and mortar, although both of those are vital. The panel was told that public libraries welcome all residents, including the vulnerable, low income and those who may not be welcome in other places.

Libraries were described as community hubs and the playground of the community, a place where programs and services are designed for all. Some of the many programs described included those for young children, for seniors, and for immigrants. Some of the services include employment information, access to computers and banking and literacy help. For more information about the existing structure of public libraries, please see Appendix C.

What the panel heard has been divided into eight themes which are described in this report: Funding Structure and Predictability; Provincial Public Library Strategic Plan; “One Card, One Province”; Communication; Governance Training; Indigenization; Value of Public Libraries; and Legislation.

Who the Panel met with or received written submissions from

The panel met with representatives from all 11 Saskatchewan public library systems:

- Chinook Regional Library
- Lakeland Library Region
- Paskisimon Nuyeh?áh Library System
- Palliser Regional Library
- Parkland Regional Library
- Prince Albert Public Library
- Regina Public Library
- Saskatoon Public Library
- Southeast Regional Library
- Wapiti Regional Library
- Wheatland Regional Library

The panel also met and/or received submissions from the following stakeholders:

- Library Services for Saskatchewan Aboriginal Peoples (LSSAP)
- Multitype Library Board (MLB)
- Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)
- Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA)
- Saskatchewan Library Trustees Association (SLTA)
- Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)

Key Themes

Theme 1: Funding Structure and Predictability

All of the stakeholders and library systems expressed interest in further discussion around funding stability related to provincial grants and the future of the public library systems.

Regional libraries are funded by both provincial and municipal grants. Municipal libraries are funded through property taxes and a provincial grant. The Pahlkisiimon Nuyeh?áh Library System is funded primarily by provincial grants. The provincial grant for each library system varies in terms of the percentage of their total budgets, from approximately 37 per cent for regional libraries, to 3 per cent for municipal libraries and 83 per cent for the northern library system.

Even though there is no federal funding made available, a portion of provincial grants is designated to support public library services to First Nations and Métis residents. Several of the systems had concerns that more resources were needed in this area in order to better engage with indigenous populations. For more information, please see the Theme 6: Indigenization.

Resource Sharing Grants

Provincial funding is primarily provided to public library systems via resource sharing grants. The municipal libraries and northern library system receive the same grant amounts each year. The seven regional systems' amounts are determined using a funding formula in accordance with *The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996*, applied to a grant pool. This core grant funding has remained unchanged since 2012.

The majority of the library systems that met with the panel discussed the impact of having no increase to provincial grant funding. Several mentioned that they prioritized public services while cutting administrative services to the system. Board members highlighted the efforts undertaken to reduce administrative costs, and that public services will need to be looked at.

Several regional systems indicated that funding from municipalities had increased, but that municipalities were reluctant to provide any more increases. This was also shared by SUMA and SARM, who said that their members were concerned that stagnant provincial funding was affecting municipal budgets and that their members were reluctant to fund a larger percentage of public library budgets.

Regional libraries stressed the importance of consistent stable multi-year funding to ensure good management practices. All three of the municipal libraries stressed the importance for regional libraries to be better funded in order for municipal libraries to be able to function within a provincial library system. These municipal libraries expressed concerns that they have difficulties adopting new technology if the regional library systems do not have the capacity to also participate. All concerns were rooted in the desire to provide equitable province-wide services to the residents of Saskatchewan.

There was some discussion from regional library systems on the funding formula used to determine their funding amounts. There was concern about the specific factors used, but no consensus on how it might be changed.

However, all agreed that the provincial funding formula needs reviewing.

Northern Library System Grant

The northern library system has no provision for taxation in the legislation and is wholly dependent on provincial government funding. Since funding has remained unchanged since 2012, while costs have increased, the northern system faces unique challenges without access to another funding source. Members of their board explained that because of the geography of their region, they have significant transportation and shipping costs. While a number of efficiencies have been adopted, such as fewer in-person meetings of the board, they expressed concerns that the North has fewer resources in their public libraries than libraries located in other parts of the province.

Theme 2: Provincial Public Library Strategic Plan

Many of the library systems expressed a desire for either a provincial public library system strategic plan that all systems participate in, or a strategic plan for the Provincial Library and Literacy Office (PLLO). There were two main reasons for this, the first one being desire to have a plan that reflected the goals of public libraries; and the second being a clearer understanding of the goals of the provincial government.

Public Libraries as a distinct and unique sector

The majority of library systems recognized that the Ministry of Education has had a focus on advancing the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). The ESSP is a province-wide strategic plan developed in co-operation with education sector partners, approved by school boards and accepted by the Government of Saskatchewan. The ESSP envelopes many ministry initiatives and mainly focuses on improving K-12 education. It does not specifically identify public libraries targets or initiatives.

Library systems felt it was important to explain that public libraries are a distinct and unique sector and do not have the same goals as K-12 education.

Library board members talked about the need for libraries to support Saskatchewan residents during their entire life, by meeting both their educational and recreational needs. They identified the creation of a provincial public library strategic plan as a method that the sector can use to coordinate program and service initiatives and better serve Saskatchewan residents. They identified that the participation of the Ministry of Education as a partner in the creation of a strategic plan would help them better understand the goals of the provincial government.

Theme 3: One Card, One Province

A lot of pride was expressed in the public library services offered in Saskatchewan which are nationally and internationally recognized for being unique and providing excellent library services to residents.

“One Card, One Province”

The “One Card, One Province” service is highly valued by all public library systems. Residents can get a library card in any library system in the province that will work seamlessly in the rest of the library systems. A resident can request materials owned from any library system in the province and have it delivered to their home branch. Library systems expressed continued support to provide this service equitably across the province and free to library users.

This program was described as a valued service in every engagement session. This means that rural residents should be able to easily access materials from across the province at no charge. It also means that Saskatchewan residents can use any library in the province. An example of this, is checking out books to read from the local library near their cottage. This is an anomaly in other Canadian jurisdictions. In Ontario and Alberta, for example, using a different library system than where one lives, involves registering for another library card and paying a fee. The “One Card, One Province” system is highly valued and crucial to the provision of equitable library service in the province.

To ensure its continued success and support, the library sector needs to pay attention to the relationships and balance at the individual library system level. When the regional systems struggle, it puts strain on this relationship. All need to function for the provincial library system to be successful.

Theme 4: Communication with Provincial Library

Most of the organizations we spoke to identified a need for increased communication across all parts of the provincial public library system. In particular, they felt the greatest need was between the Provincial Library and Literacy Office (PLLO) and the public library systems. The other need being the relationships between library systems themselves.

Since the legislation was passed in 1996, there has been considerable change in both public libraries and the provincial government. According to legislation, the PLLO provides the policy framework that supports cooperation in the provincial public library system. It also provides cost-effective central services to public libraries, administers provincial grants and other provincial services, coordinates resource sharing, and provides policy and program support to regional and northern library systems.

As the public library system has matured and evolved over time, role clarity and different ways of collaboration have become important. The library sector is interested in developing more frequent communication with PLLO. They expressed an interest in increased support and expertise. This may include such things as PLLO having an increased presence at regional board meetings and association activities.

Theme 5: Governance Training

There is a strong desire for more training within the public library system on the structure and processes of board governance.

There are three different governance models used in public libraries and each has its own training challenges. For example, the current governance model for the regional systems is relatively complex. There are three levels, the local library board, the regional library board and the regional library executive board. Regional library boards felt that the governance structure provided for community representation at every level, and also allowed local autonomy and flexibility.

The majority of organizations we met with identified training needs for library system board members. Each region has one or two regional board meetings each year and generally have new members come to each of these meetings. Between the municipal, regional, northern and local library boards, there are approximately 2,000 library trustees.

Library systems indicated the importance of providing awareness and clarity around the roles, responsibilities and accountability of library trustees.

Theme 6: Indigenization

Many library systems talked about the programs and services offered for indigenous library users. This included resources, cultural programs and provincial programs such as Saskatchewan Aboriginal Storytelling Month. Library systems are interested in further developing this area and ensure that services to indigenous library users be more front and centre in service planning.

The provincial government currently provides grants to specifically support access to public libraries to those living on reserve. This is funding to ensure that all residents can access the “One Card, One Province” system. Library systems indicated that there may be additional partnerships required to enhance library services.

Library systems acknowledged this funding, but said that they were interested in providing better services to Indigenous library users. In the past, library systems have made agreements with individual First Nations to support the operations of public library service on reserve. Some of the regional systems expressed interest in doing this again, while others were concerned about providing improvements to current community based programming and initiatives. There were also some concerns that there needed to be additional amendments to the legislation to be more inclusive. Library systems are looking for additional ways to meaningfully engage with First Nations on reserve in order to develop resources that best meet the needs of their community.

Theme 7: Value of Public Libraries

According to the stakeholders, there is a need for a greater understanding of the value of public libraries within provincial government. Stakeholders also felt that public libraries are well positioned to assist with meeting government goals.

The representatives that met with the panel used statistics, analysis of outcomes and anecdotal evidence to describe the value of public libraries to Saskatchewan residents and communities. Library systems use assessment and research to determine the cost effective programs and services to offer. Many had ideas of how this could be developed at a provincial level. Given the proven value of public libraries to the province, the proposed funding reduction in the 2017 budget was felt as an attack on public libraries.

Public libraries work individually at the community level, more broadly at the regional or system level and are able to network to provide provincial services. Public libraries are positioned to be a community space and support for ministries like Justice, Social Services, Education, and Health. Library systems explained that they are aligned with many areas of government and can be leveraged to provide access to all residents in the province, including rural areas.

Theme 8: Legislation

The last time *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* was revised in a major way was over 20 years ago. Public library service delivery has changed in the last 20 years, and the legislation needs to be updated to reflect this.

The majority of library systems and stakeholders agreed that the legislation is generally good, but needs some updating. It was agreed: “We are doing aspirational things because we have a fundamentally strong structure”.

When discussing legislation, the following were referenced:

- *The Public Libraries Act, 1996*
- *The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996*

While a formal legislative review has not been undertaken, a number of regional systems and stakeholders agreed 29(1) of *The Public Libraries Act, 1996*, which requires that all municipalities located in the boundaries of a regional library system participate in that system and make payments to it was important. Many also mentioned that library services should continue to be free to all Saskatchewan residents.

Many systems felt that the current legislation allowed for local flexibility and had a very democratic governance structure that they would like to maintain. However, most also described having issues dealing with the three governance levels (local board, regional board, executive board). Training and communication were specifically mentioned.

Many said that the legislation is from 1996 and needs to be modernized. The inclusion of technology within the act came up several times. There was concern that the legislation should be looked at to ensure that it reflects the changing nature of library services.

Several regional library systems expressed concerns that there were no standards in the legislation for library facilities. There were a number of examples described of inaccessible or unsafe facilities that house libraries. This was identified as a serious issue because the library systems hire staff who work in the local libraries, but do not have any control to ensure an appropriate working environment.

There was some discussion about co-located school and public libraries, called joint ventures in the legislation. There were stories of both success and challenge. In some cases, such co-location works very well, especially the facilities that are purpose-built. There were concerns about the time commitment required to make this successful while ensuring it works for both the library and the school. In general, library systems were willing to work on these types of partnerships as well as other partnerships to make libraries viable, but that there is no one solution that works in every community.

Conclusion

The public library systems of Saskatchewan provide nationally recognized library programs and services to residents of the province. The panel heard many stories, statistics and facts that illustrated the value of public libraries to the stakeholders we spoke to. Many of the people we met with spoke with pride of their work and their library.

They spoke from their hearts and shared their concerns honestly and with the hope of working with the provincial government to ensure a strong, equitable provincial library system.

We would like to thank everyone who met with us, or provided information to those we met with. We believe that this report will be an anchor as the library systems continue to develop to meet the future needs of Saskatchewan residents.

When I initially started as Chair of the Libraries Engagement Panel, I didn't know what to expect. I have met with passionate and engaged stakeholders. I have learned that there is a need for libraries across the province. I have seen and heard that a variety of people use public libraries, from young children to seniors, from longtime residents to newcomers, and people from all areas of society. They all find something that they wish to access at their public library, including Internet banking, reading a magazine, learning about government services, or meeting a friend. This has been a wonderful learning experience and I thank everyone I had the opportunity to meet with.

- Terry Dennis, Legislative Secretary

Appendices

Appendix A

Library Engagement Sessions

Date	Location
October 10, 2018	Saskatoon Public Library
November 10, 2018	Chinook Regional Library
November 16, 2018	Southeast Regional Library
November 17, 2018	Palliser Regional Library
November 23, 2018	City of Prince Albert Public Library Board
November 29, 2018	Saskatchewan Library Trustees Association (SLTA)
November 29, 2018	Multitype Library Board (MLB)
November 30, 2018	Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System
December 1, 2018	Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA)
December 1, 2018	Wheatland Regional Library
December 7, 2018	Wapiti Regional Library
December 8, 2018	Lakeland Library Region
December 9, 2018	Parkland Regional Library
December 10, 2018	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)
December 10, 2018	Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)
December 10, 2018	Regina Public Library

Appendix B

Library Engagement Session Questions

The Panel is looking forward to meeting with representatives of all of the library systems. We have developed a series of questions around which we plan to have a discussion and dialogue. In order for this to work, we have prepared a series of guidelines below.

The Panel will meet with one group per library system and are expecting this to be a maximum of 12 people who are representing the views of your library system. How you gather the input and engage is up to you, but in order for the engagement to be successful, we are expecting to meet with a small group.

Working with a group of no less than 12 will allow for open, honest discussion that will ensure all participants have time to represent their and their constituents' views. With that in mind, these discussions are not intended to be open to media or the public.

As previously discussed, a public document will be available and released after the engagement sessions.

If possible, we would love to meet in headquarter facilities or local libraries.

The engagement sessions will consist of the Panel asking the same questions to each library system and providing an opportunity for other topics to be introduced by the library system.

Each library system can submit one written submission after their engagement session.

We want to ensure that the information collected from each library system is given the same weight, so we will attempt to maintain similar sessions in each location.

Discussion Questions

1. Legislation

- What are the strengths of the current legislation?
- What concerns do you have regarding the legislation?

Other areas for you to consider include:

- Areas that the legislation enables your services or causes barriers.
- Any suggestions regarding how funding is allocated.
- Any comments on what you are able to charge for locally, and what impact this has on programs and services you deliver.
- Should the restrictions on provincial funding change?
- Any areas that you wish were covered in the legislation, or practices from other jurisdictions that you think would work in Saskatchewan.
- Any components in the legislation that would assist with relationship building between your library system and any reserves within your boundaries.

2. Governance

The Public Libraries Act, 1996 describes three different governance models: municipal libraries, regional libraries and the northern library system.

- What are the strengths of governance model used by your system?
- What are some weaknesses of the governance model used by your system?

As you consider these questions, please feel free to note:

- Governance areas that work (or not) that are outlined in the legislation.
- Any local governance decisions/policies that you wish were part of legislation
- Are our boundaries where they should be?
- If you feel that your library system has the appropriate amount of authority when working in partnership with municipalities, schools or other partners.

3. Role clarity and responsibilities (provincial, municipal, library boards)

- What should be the responsibilities of the provincial government (including the Provincial Library and Literacy Office/Ministry of Education), municipal government and library boards?

Other areas for you to consider include:

- Highlight your expectations of the provincial government (Ministry of Education/Provincial Library and Literacy Office).
- Consider describing how you see the roles of different levels of government changing in the future.

4. Impact of fiscal pressures

- With a finite budget and resources, what choices and/or strategic decisions have you made in your library system to ensure a balanced budget?

Please feel free to highlight:

- Any changes in your library system if the current financial situation continues.
- Any new efficiencies that your library system has considered or incorporated that could be helpful to others.
- Any areas that you believe may be opportunity for efficiency in the province-wide system.

5. Future of public libraries in Saskatchewan

- What is your vision for the future of your library system?
- What is your vision for our province-wide public library system?

Additional areas for you to consider include:

- Your expectations of other library systems in the province.
- Identifying how your library system is changing to meet this vision.
- Demographic shifts (age, move from rural to urban).
- Technology.
- Immigration.
- Best practices from other jurisdictions.

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with the panel?

Appendix C

Current Library Governance and Funding

There are over 300 public library branches in Saskatchewan making up the provincial public library system. These libraries are organized into 11 library systems that work together cooperatively and are divided into three main types as listed below. Each type has a different governance and funding model. The Provincial Library and Literacy Office, a branch of the Ministry of Education, is considered a partner in the provincial public library system.

Three municipal libraries:

- Prince Albert
- Regina
- Saskatoon

Seven regional libraries covering the south of the province. The cities referenced below are the location of the headquarters of each system:

- Chinook (Swift Current)
- Lakeland (North Battleford)
- Palliser (Moose Jaw)
- Parkland (Yorkton)
- Southeast (Weyburn)
- Wapiti (Prince Albert)
- Wheatland (Saskatoon)

One northern federation of libraries:

- Pâhkîsimon Nûye?âh Library System (headquarters in La Ronge)

In Canada, public libraries are under provincial jurisdiction; there is no federal legislation for public libraries. The provincial legislation in Saskatchewan includes *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* and *The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996*. Libraries are also governed by local policies and bylaws created by library boards and municipalities.

Current funding

Regional libraries are funded by provincial and municipal grants. Municipal libraries are funded through property taxes and a provincial grant. The Pâhkîsimon Nûye?âh Library System (PNLS) is funded primarily by the province with some local support.

In 2017, the province distributed over \$8 million in grants to public libraries. The province supports additional services to the public library system including:

- internet access for all branches
- courier system between library systems
- services for patrons with print disabilities
- multilingual library materials
- funding for out-of-province interlibrary loans
- summer reading initiatives
- cataloguing services
- coordination and support of the province-wide public library system

Municipalities in regional library systems are required to pay into the regional board for the maintenance of the regional library system. The regional library board includes representation from every municipality and this group sets the levy amount, which is approved at the Annual General Meeting of each board. Each regional system determines its own levy mechanism, but in general, communities pay according to a scale, with larger centres paying more than smaller rural municipalities within the region.

In Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, a mill rate is requested by the library board and determined by city council to cover the expenses of operating the public library services within the city.

In regional systems, municipalities are responsible for the library facilities in their community. In Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, the library board is responsible for library facilities. In the, Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System facilities are the responsibility of the northern municipality in which the library is located.

What services do public libraries provide?

Public libraries loan materials including books, e-books, magazines, DVDs, license access to various digital resources, and provide programs based on the needs of the community.

All public libraries are required to provide basic library services, at no charge to Saskatchewan residents. Basic library services in *The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996* are defined as:

- providing access to library resources
- developing library collections according to the needs and interests of the community
- developing programs that meet local needs for cultural, economic, educational and recreational information.

Roles and Responsibilities:

What is the role of the provincial government?

The province provides the legislative structure that governs how libraries are funded, defines what a public library is and what services are free.

The province has authority over boundaries, dispute resolution, dissolution of a library system, and disbursement of provincial grants. The minister can also call meetings of board chairs and library directors and access the records of every public library board.

Provincial funding is provided in the form of resource sharing grants for the regional systems. Each of the seven regional systems is given a share of the grant pool based on a formula that takes into account population of the region, the number of materials purchased within the system, and the total open hours of library branches.

- An operating grant is given to Pahkisimon Nuye?áh, Regina and Saskatoon. Prince Albert as a new municipal library (2018) would be eligible for this funding in fiscal year 2019-2020.

Provincial grants include funds for Aboriginal library services to ensure all First Nations residents have universal access to public libraries.

What is the role of the municipal government?

Municipalities provide local oversight for libraries by appointing community members to sit on library boards. They are also responsible for collecting taxes from their communities to fund library operations.

Municipalities, along with their regional library board, choose whether or not there is a library within their community. If a community chooses to have a library, they are responsible for providing and maintaining an appropriate facility.

Legislation also allows for the provision for joint ventures; a library board can enter into an agreement with any community partner to provide services from one facility. Some joint venture agreements have been signed with schools. Libraries can also be found in shared facilities such as municipal offices and recreation centres.

Municipalities that are part of regional systems through their representative on the regional board vote on setting the funding level for the regional system.

What is the role of SILS?

The Saskatchewan Information and Library Services (SILS) consortium was formed as a way to implement and manage the “One Card, One Province” system for public libraries in 2009. With this system, library patrons can get and use a library card at any public library in the province, do a single search in the shared catalogue to see all materials held in Saskatchewan public libraries, and place holds on those materials and have them delivered to their home branch. It also provides cost-saving and efficiencies through centralizing some IT services for all Saskatchewan public libraries.

What is the role of the library board?

A public library board is a governing board with the authority to make policy and to govern the library’s affairs within the framework of Saskatchewan’s *The Public Libraries Act, 1996*.

Library boards are made up of community volunteers, appointed by municipal council, with many board members also having roles on municipal councils (i.e. reeves, councilors, mayors).

There are five different types of library boards:

Municipal boards

- Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert each have a municipal library board responsible for the general management, regulation and control of the library.
- This board is a corporate entity and has full legal responsibility for the library including the hiring of a director, overseeing financial matters, undertaking planning, and accepting grants.

Regional boards

- Each region has a regional board responsible for the general management, control and operation of a regional library.
- The regional board includes representation from each municipality in the region.
- The regional board is a corporate entity and has full legal responsibility for its library and can hire a director, oversee financial matters, undertake planning, and accept grants.

Local board

- Local library boards within the regional system advise on local policy, facility, public relations campaigns in the community, and programming. They are not legal entities.

Northern library system board

- This library system is a federation of libraries in the north so the representation on the board includes members appointed by school advisory committees or boards of education, First Nations, northern community public library boards, regional colleges and post-secondary institutions.
- The Northern library system board is a corporate entity and has full legal responsibility for its library including the hiring of a director, overseeing financial matters, undertaking planning, and accepting grants.

Northern community public library board

- Each public library in the north has a northern community public library board.
- The Northern community public library board is a corporate entity and has full legal responsibility for its library including the hiring of staff, overseeing financial matters, undertaking planning, and accepting grants.