



Canadian Library Association
Association canadienne des bibliothèques

Pre-Budget Submission

**Presented to:
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**

Presented by:

**The Canadian Library Association/
*Association canadienne des bibliothèques***

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Executive Summary

2011 Federal Pre-Budget Submission from the Canadian Library Association

The Canadian Library Association / Association canadienne des bibliothèques (CLA) is Canada's largest national library association, representing the interests of approximately 57,000 library staff and thousands of libraries of all kinds across Canada on a range of public policy issues. Libraries and librarians speak on behalf of all library users: millions of students, educators, scholars, researchers, lifelong learners, special library users, and recreational readers, from children to seniors, who are all concerned with enhancing the quality of life of Canadians through information and literacy.

When it comes to ensuring prosperity and a sustainable future for Canadians, libraries play a key role in providing all Canadians with access to the material that is integral to ensuring that they are regular contributors to the economic, social and cultural success of their communities. Long-term investments in libraries will provide incredible benefits and intrinsic value for all Canadians.

CLA 2011 Budget Recommendations

In this context, and as part of the Finance Committee's pre-budget consultations, CLA thanks the Government of Canada for the opportunity to provide the following recommendations for federal program spending measures that will ensure prosperity and a sustainable future for Canadians.

Recommendation 1:

The Canadian Library Association recommends that the Government of Canada allocate long-term, sustainable and dedicated infrastructure funding for Canada's public and academic libraries. Infrastructure investment initiatives that can support public libraries are vital to their future success, benefitting all Canadians; support for Canada's research infrastructure benefits all Canadians through education and economic growth.

Recommendation 2:

The Canadian Library Association recommends that the Government of Canada develop an overarching, national digital economy policy framework, recognizing Canada's libraries as a key component. This includes targeted long-term funding for the continuation of the Community Access Program, enhanced access to broadband networks, and accessibility of Canadian content on the network.

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About the Canadian Library Association

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The Economic Impact of Canada's Libraries

Sustainable investments in libraries pay long-term dividends in having an economically stronger and more socially inclusive community. No matter what the current economic situation is, Canadians know that they can get the information, services and assistance they need from their public library.

Public libraries have become increasingly popular places for Canadians to come in and make use of the library's free resources. Whether it is surfing online for employment opportunities, borrowing DVDs for family entertainment or browsing periodicals to keep up on current events, libraries are the setting for thousands of individuals who are taking advantage of a place that is available to all.

Across Canada, the majority of cities have reported large increases in their services and programs, not to mention items being borrowed by the millions. For example, in Calgary alone in 2008, borrowing was up by 1.1 million for a total of 15.4 million – an increase of 7.7% from 2007. Calgary's 17 branch libraries were the second busiest in the country after Toronto, and sixth busiest in North America.

Key 2008 Ottawa statistics include an increase in library visits by 12%, an increase in usage of library items by almost 23%, and increase in the number of visits to the library's online resources such as the website and online reference questions by 14%.

It is clear that public libraries are extremely beneficial for entertainment and leisure purposes. However, it is worth highlighting that public libraries also provide essential resources to help stimulate Canada's national economy. Public libraries play an important role in assisting people with literacy skills, résumé creation, job location and application, and re-education opportunities.

Infrastructure Funding for Libraries

As library services and resources continue to rise in demand, essential programs are in extreme danger of being cut, due to the lack of federal investments. In addition to needing more library employees to keep up with the quick-moving pace of library visitors, some public libraries are in need of physical space and technological infrastructure upgrades.

Over the years, the federal government has – through a variety of mechanisms – initiated and increased its investment in libraries and cultural facilities. A number of initiatives have supported libraries, including the Infrastructure Canada Program, the Building Canada Plan, the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, and Canadian Heritage Programming.

CLA acknowledges and thanks the Government of Canada for these commitments; however, as these have all been short-term initiatives, with libraries considered as “secondary priorities” in most cases, there is much more that can be done.

Public library investments must be explored in the same manner that roads, bridges and hospitals are looked at. Investing in public library infrastructure will help to improve Canadians’ quality of life in a number of different ways and is key to future economic development.

As there is no dedicated component for libraries in any federal investment program, Canada still lacks a long-term, sustainable approach to public library infrastructure investment. With targeted investments, libraries can continue to provide a safe and thriving public environment within Canada’s communities. Infrastructure investment initiatives that support public libraries are vital to their future success, benefitting all Canadians.

The Role of Libraries in Canada’s Digital Economy

It is clear that the Government of Canada recognizes the increasingly important role of Canada’s digital economy. It is imperative to note that Canada’s libraries can and should be instrumental in the development of a national digital economy.

Libraries are working to keep pace with the necessary changes to the ways we provide access to information, the materials we collect, and the formats we preserve. Without strong national digital and information policies, we risk losing material simply because we can no longer maintain access to it in the format in which it was produced.

Libraries will play a key role as national digital economy policies are implemented, as they provide Canadians with equitable access to the content contained within that digital infrastructure.

The Federal Government must develop policies to ensure that Canadians have access both to emerging and digital media, and the skills needed to make the best use of the opportunities that these media provide. These include developing a national digital strategy, passing and implementing balanced copyright legislation, ensuring access to sufficient bandwidth, and implementing open access policies for public information and data.

The Community Access Program

A key component of Canada's digital economy is the Community Access Program (CAP). CAP provides Canadians with affordable public access to the Internet and the skills they need to use it effectively in order to take advantage of emerging opportunities in the new global knowledge-based economy.

CLA recognizes and thanks the Government of Canada for the renewal of CAP for an additional year, highlighted in the most recent federal budget. However, as CAP continues to be renewed only on an annual basis, the library community remains concerned about the uncertainty of the program.

Libraries are valuable CAP providers, as they already play an essential role within their communities. Offering free access to information and technology, libraries are centres of learning, literacy, information and innovation. They are the public's preferred point of Internet access, and are truly open to all.

Under CAP, public locations such as libraries provide computer support and training. In addition, libraries provide up-to-date information and access to individuals who go on to contribute to the economic and cultural life of their communities. People use this information for work, to study and innovate, and to gather and collaborate. Students, researchers, educators and members of the business community all use the local public library to participate in the local and national economy.

Libraries also play an important role specifically in reaching out to the working poor and those on the wrong side of the digital divide. If the CAP program is designed to allow everyone, regardless of social status or financial status, to participate in the knowledge economy, then libraries must be a focal point of that goal.

It is absolutely crucial that the Community Access Program continue with long-term, sustainable funding, as it serves a vital role in communities across the country.

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