



Centre for Equitable Library Access
Centre d'accès équitable aux bibliothèques

Request for support from the Government of Canada in the 2015 Budget

Executive Summary

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) seek funding of \$9.75 million over the next three years. This funding will be used to support the production of published works in alternative formats for the new national public library service for the more than three million Canadians with print disabilities, launched on April 1, 2014.

Of the criteria prioritized by the Finance Committee for its pre-budget consultations, CELA addresses:

- Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education and training
- Ensuring prosperous and secure communities, including through support for infrastructure

The history of this initiative, its implementation and current status, and the rationale for Government of Canada support are set out below.

Background

CNIB has offered library service to Canadians with vision loss since 1906. But as a charity, CNIB faces two challenges. First, there is growing community resistance to channeling those with print disabilities through a charity to meet their reading and information needs, when everyone else can avail themselves of public libraries. Secondly, CNIB operates in an increasingly difficult fundraising environment. Such funds as it can generate have to cover a wide range of programs and services, of which the library is just one.

Recognizing these challenges, the Government of Canada participated in various initiatives, starting in 2006, to identify and prepare for alternative paths. Given the consensus that any solution should be market-driven, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) took a leadership role and, in consultation with the Canadian Library Association (CLA) and CNIB, incorporated and financed the Centre for Equitable Library Access in late 2013. CELA's mandate is to support equitable access to published materials for people with print disabilities across Canada, delivered through local public libraries.

Enabling public libraries to offer Canadians with print disabilities access to a greater diversity of published materials will support their educational development, increase their participation in mainstream community services, developing their potential for broader social inclusion and labour market attachment.

CELA

CELA launched in April 2014. Participating libraries register their eligible patrons, after which they can access more than 250,000 alternative format materials in DAISY audio, e-text and braille. These patrons will be referrals by the CNIB, or residents who seek accessible service from their local library directly. CELA has two critical roles: production of alternative format versions of published materials and distribution to Canadians with print disabilities through public libraries

CELA is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representative of public libraries, together with several Board committees, sub-committees and working groups, as well as user and library operations advisory groups, to ensure that the service is fully responsive to community needs. CELA is supported by the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) through start-up funding, office support, and commitments from its members to join CELA.

CNIB/CELA partnership

CELA's service model incorporates CNIB's expertise, including its digital infrastructure (for which the Federal Government provided development funding) and specialized staff. This has been achieved through a contract between CELA and CNIB. These are some of the key aspects of that agreement:

- Opening equitable access to the more than 3 million Canadians with a print disability, and not simply those persons with vision loss, which therefore now includes those whose print disability (as defined by copyright law) is lack of dexterity, and a range of learning disabilities;
- Supporting public library outreach to the print disabled community with materials and training;
- Repertoire and services in both official languages;
- Focusing on the reading needs of younger Canadians, First Nations and minority language communities;
- Offering those with print disabilities the widest range possible of reading materials in the accessible formats and delivery channels they need, only possible through a centralized agency with the financial, technical and human resources needed to achieve that objective;
- CNIB Library's digital collection may in due course become the CELA collection, subject to agreement between CNIB and CELA on the legal and financial aspects of this transition;
- Production of alternative format materials in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act.

CELA provides access to the digital book repository and other resources currently housed at CNIB, and to the Bookshare collection (currently over 180,000 books accessible in Canada) to any eligible patron of a participating public library. CNIB's leadership in the Trusted Intermediary Global Accessible Resources (TIGAR) service of the international Accessible Books Consortium will be leveraged to further expand the CELA repertoire, bringing in titles published in other countries and other languages.

In 2014/2015 the cost to CELA of delivering equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities through their public library will be approximately \$6.3 million. Of this, 49.8% (\$3.14 million) relates to production, and 50.2% for acquisitions, licensing, service delivery, technology and support, and administration.

This funding proposal by CELA and CNIB to operate a national library service for Canadians with print disabilities requires a partnership between:

- private sector, which will principally be the CNIB, raising funds through donations, bequests etc
- provincial governments
- member libraries, including CULC members, joining independently if not covered by provincial support
- Government of Canada

The relative shares of each partner will be recalibrated over the next few years, but for the next fiscal year the goal is to secure 50% of the funding from the Government of Canada, with the remainder being provided by provincial/territorial funding, a significant contribution from Canada's large urban libraries, and the balance covered by the CNIB.

Current status

CELA was launched on April 1, with the transition of CNIB's existing Partner libraries and their eligible patrons (in Alberta, Ontario and New Brunswick) to the new CELA Member Services. From that date, new CNIB clients seeking library service were referred to their local library to be registered for CELA service.

As at July 31, funding agreements have been signed or are pending with the governments of Alberta, New Brunswick, NWT, Ontario and PEI. There is also an agreement in place between CELA and the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ) that ensures:

- access to the complete English-language repertoire for residents of Québec
- reciprocal access to the BAnQ French-language repertoire for Canadians outside Québec

Under their commitment to support CELA, almost all of the member libraries of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) in all provinces except Nova Scotia subscribe to CELA. In total, therefore, there are now approximately 600 member libraries with 1,550 service delivery points.

Government of Canada support

The Federal Government has supported several projects that preceded and led to the new model for the delivery of accessible library services:

- In FY2010-2012 the Federal Government provided \$7 million to CNIB to revitalize its library technology, complete the conversion of its analog collection to digital, grow the digital collection, support the operation of the CNIB Library for two years, and “make progress in support of the development of long term funding and service arrangement with Provincial and Territorial governments and other stakeholders for ongoing accessible library services past March 31st, 2012. All operational objectives within the funding agreement were met and delivered on schedule and on budget. CNIB developed a service model/business plan, called *Reading Re-Imagined: a national digital Hub to support service delivery to Canadians with print disabilities*. This model proposed that the national digital Hub would be a not-for-profit entity, separate from CNIB.
- In FY2013 the Federal Government committed \$3 million dollars to support the National Digital Hub incubating within the CNIB Library for the first two years of Phase I. This allowed the Hub to produce new alternative format materials, and improve its client services while gaining commitment and a sustainable funding plan for the proposed new national digital Hub. It also created the operational context that allowed for transitioning CNIB activities to the new national not-for-profit entity, now operating as CELA.

Finance Committee criteria

CELA is therefore the logical extension of a process that the Government of Canada actively encouraged, and invested in through its support of the CNIB in developing the "HUB" concept on which CELA is based. National governments in many countries provide funding to ensure a national library service for their citizens with print disabilities. These investments deliver a significant return through:

- equitable access to public libraries to an alternative format collection for their print-disabled community
- support for vulnerable families
- promoting health, education and training for Canadians with print disabilities, thereby helping them to attain self-sufficiency and to be better able to enter the workforce
- encouraging inclusive communities where people live, work and participate

The funding requested in this proposal addresses the needs of more than three million Canadians with print disabilities, a number projected to increase in tandem with greater life expectancy.

CELA in association with the CNIB is seeking \$3.25 million for each of three years commencing April 2015. There are compelling reasons for support from the Federal Government:

- this is a new initiative that meets a significant need, namely providing accessible reading and information materials for Canadians with print disabilities through their public libraries;
- it needs sustainability in its funding through its formative years to provide stability while the operations and services are being established;
- CELA will ensure equality of access for all Canadians with print disabilities: it will be targeted at any print disability and not just vision loss, it will provide service and content in both official languages, it will

include programs for First Nations libraries, it will place special emphasis on young readers, and it will increasingly use new technologies to produce and deliver accessible content;

- CELA provides a simple mechanism for the Government of Canada to comply with the Marrakesh Treaty, which requires an entity that can facilitate, promote, and disseminate accessible format copies of works and exchange information with other countries about accessible works.

The National Library Service for the Blind receives more than \$70 million a year in funding from the U.S. Government, through the Library of Congress. Adjusted for population, CELA is requesting support at less than half that level from the Government of Canada.

This proposal aligns with the constitutional division of responsibilities: provinces/territories will fund service delivery and related costs, with Government of Canada funding directed to costs associated with the production of works in alternative formats, including a project to increase both the number of new titles and the speed with which they are made available, further reducing the disadvantages experienced by those with print disabilities.

Community support

Letters of support for CELA have been received from several organizations, including the Canadian Council of the Blind, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, National Educational Association of Disabled Students and Access for Sight-Impaired Consumers.

Next steps

There are more than 3 million Canadians with print disabilities. Of these, 33% experience varying degrees of vision loss, 27% have learning disabilities (e.g. autism, brain injuries) and the remaining 40% have challenges with dexterity - the ability to actually handle a book (e.g. arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's). They are significantly disadvantaged in the workforce – only 35% of working-age adults with blindness or partial sight are employed, and their average gross annual income is less than \$20,000 regardless of marital or family status. Fewer than half graduate from high school. Across the full range of print disabilities, the employment rate is just 45%. By providing greater access to reading materials in alternative formats through public libraries, their prospects for improving their literacy and their education will be enhanced, opening up new and wider opportunities for employment and engagement with others in their community.

CELA will tap into existing investments and synergies, enabling libraries to utilize the economies of scale offered by a centralized resource. It will finally allow those with print disabilities to be full participants in the social, economic, and learning spheres of their local communities. And all of this will cost less than 20 cents per person, of which this proposal asks the Government of Canada to pay half.



Andrew Martin
Senior Project Director
Centre for Equitable Library Access

August 6, 2014