



Canadian Federation of Library Associations
Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

**Libraries: Critical Social Infrastructure for
Canada's COVID-19 Recovery**

Submitted by:

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Recommendations

- 1) CFLA-FCAB recommends that the government invest \$100 million over the next four years to help support affordable digital infrastructure in libraries. As community hubs, libraries are regularly used to access internet and online services. Following the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring remote learning and/or working spaces are available is crucial to meeting this demand while respecting physical distancing measures.
- 2) CFLA-FCAB recommends that the government commit to \$200 million over the next four years to help implement efficient and cost-effective green infrastructure in vital community hubs from coast to coast to coast. Investment in a targeted library upgrade investment fund supports the circular economy and Canada's Federal Sustainable Development Strategy's.
- 3) CFLA-FCAB recommends that the government invest \$30 million in the fair and equitable access to online materials so that Canadians can continue following public health and safety measures following the COVID-19 pandemic.

LIBRARIES IN CANADA

Canada's libraries are, almost exclusively, publicly funded institutions. Whether supported by municipal governments, or as part of educational institutions, they receive public funds to operate. As a result, when shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries were not able to access programs like the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, despite having increased operating costs.

Over the long-term, libraries help more Canadians access the information and support they need to lead fuller lives, make new discoveries, and better understand the world they live in. Libraries' mission of universal access to knowledge products and information underpins a commitment to equity that makes it possible for Canadians from all socio-economic backgrounds to thrive.

For Canada's recovery, libraries will continue to play their important role in communities and on campuses as centres for sharing knowledge. Many will also play an increasingly important role of providing services to people who face economic hardship as a result of the pandemic. As people who are un- or underemployed take a pathway to education and training, research libraries will be critical to their journey. For others, who have lost jobs or just need a safe, quiet, welcoming place to connect in person or online, libraries will be part of their social safety net.

We look forward to supporting Canadians and call on the government to support us in the mission we share.

SUPPORT FOR AFFORDABLE DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Canada's competitiveness depends not only on creating the appropriate environment for businesses to thrive, but also on ensuring everyone can take advantage of new opportunities in the knowledge-based economy. Access to information, tools, and services that unlock creativity and empower progress is vital, and Canada's libraries are leading the way.

Canadians, especially those who face socio-economic barriers, need and expect libraries to provide equitable access to spaces that facilitate digital literacy, collaboration, innovation, and community gathering, as well as access to technology. In many communities, especially those that are smaller, remote, or Indigenous, access to adequate library space is often compromised by inadequate infrastructure, both digital and physical.

We know the value that rural and remote communities can derive from improved access as they will be better able to discover and support economic opportunities. In fact, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada recently emphasized that it is imperative for the "majority of Canada's Aboriginal communities [to] have access to reliable high-speed internet." Likewise, the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy identifies the importance of improved infrastructure in Indigenous communities.

Libraries have long been hubs of internet access for their communities in both educational and professional capacities. Many libraries in fact have access to mobile data and devices through internet hotspot programs, providing communities with a way to engage, learn, and discover new opportunities. Moving forward, as our country recovers from the COVID-19 crisis online learning and professional development opportunities have become even more of a vital resource for millions of Canadians.

In the 2020 Fiscal and Economic Snapshot released by the Ministry of Finance, it was estimated that unemployment rates will fall between 14-7% by the end of 2020¹. Canadians are getting back on their feet, and are relying on community hubs like libraries to seek out opportunities, brush up on new skills, take a course, and join an online network of like-minded professionals.

Libraries need federal funding and telecom regimes that provide for accessible, affordable broadband and mobile data across Canada, particularly in remote, rural, and Indigenous communities. IT systems are expensive to maintain, and even more expensive to upgrade and modernize. Similar to updating building infrastructure, IT infrastructure upgrades will allow for revenues to be directed to other client facing services while providing a modernized legacy benefit for institutions, all while providing Canadians with the tools they need to be successful in this day and age.

¹ Economic and Fiscal Snapshot 2020 report: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/fin/publications/efs-peb/homepage/EFS2020-eng.pdf> Last accessed July 10, 2020

The role and importance of community anchor organizations for broadband services has been recognized by the program High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy² noting "Government investment will give special consideration to the needs of anchor institutions, such as libraries, schools, hospitals and local government buildings. Connect to Innovate is connecting more than 1,100 anchor institutions because of their key placement as hubs in communities."

Furthermore, community anchor institutions, and libraries in particular, can serve as valuable showcases for the advantages of new telecommunications services. For example, in Olds, Alberta, when the locally- owned O-Net network was being developed, the Olds Municipal Library served as a showcase for the affordances of the new 1 Gbps fibre optic service. Providing a role for libraries and other community anchor organizations as showcases for new telecommunications services can serve as a means for encouraging demand and uptake of new telecommunications services.

CFLA-FCAB recommends that the government commit to \$100 million over the next 4 years to support a targeted library upgrade investment fund. Supporting Canada's libraries will support the economic recovery.

² http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/139.nsf/eng/h_00002.html

SUPPORT FOR COST-EFFECTIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Libraries have been a part of sustainable development long before the term “circular economy” was coined, and as such, Canada’s libraries support the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy³. From the 2019 progress report:

Modern, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure supports clean economic growth and social inclusion.

Both climate change and the COVID-19 emergency will exacerbate social inequalities and make it more difficult for Canadians from all backgrounds to grow and succeed. Libraries are always valuable resources, yet are consistently asked to do more with less.

Many libraries face high costs related to deferred maintenance. The costs associated with fixing older library buildings, and the increased costs of service delivery make it harder for institutions to choose investments in new, energy efficient equipment. Older buildings are harder to maintain, but government can help by supporting investments in new equipment. By doing so, we can improve health and comfort in libraries for customers, reduce carbon emissions, and lower operating costs for these institutions.

In 2016, there were more than 145 million visits to libraries in Canada, and demand is steadily rising as the pandemic continues. If the government intends to proceed with an environmentally friendly recovery, retrofitting existing structures is aligned with that goal and will benefit millions of Canadians.

By addressing maintenance gaps and energy costs, operating funds can be redirected to provide Canadians from coast to coast to coast with spaces to grow and learn, while working with the federal government towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Investing in library infrastructure will bring real social and economic benefits to the people who need it most. Facilities that were founded decades ago are seeing demands for services and collections exponentially increase while remaining underfunded. Retrofitting Canadian libraries will help in the fight against climate change and help to offer safe, healthy spaces for Canadians to access resources as our society and economy recover.

CFLA-FCAB recommends that the next government commit to \$200 million over the next 4 years to support a targeted library upgrade investment fund.

³ Canada’s Sustainable Development Strategy. website:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/conservation/sustainability/federal-sustainable-development-strategy.html>.

Last accessed July 24, 2019.

Report: http://www.fsds-sfdd.ca/downloads/FSDS_2019-2022.pdf Last accessed July 9, 2020.

SUPPORT FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ONLINE MATERIALS

Libraries provide greater equity in access to knowledge and tools. Libraries purchase a significant proportion on content licenses for digital materials that are crucial to education, research and personal fulfillment that all Canadians benefit from. All are activities that the government should promote as we aim to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to affordable broadband access, online materials such as ebooks and audio books are crucial materials for libraries in all communities to deliver. These digital materials are particularly beneficial for rural and remote communities where household access may be weak. We believe access to online materials and resources through public institutions is fundamental to personal growth and economic success in Canada and must be a consideration in our national response.

Technological progress has made resources more accessible. At the same time, Canadians' ability to engage with information, and people around the globe has increased tremendously. The possibilities presented by our reality are immense, and in a time of physical distancing and travel restrictions they are even more important.

Unfortunately, people living in many of Canada's rural and remote communities are being left out. This is troubling given that people who live furthest from population centres stand to benefit the most from the interconnectedness that broadband access to online materials facilitates.

Libraries need federal funding to expand the purchase of licenses for things like e-books and digital media. Pricing models continue to hurt institutions that face major barriers to delivering digital content that meets user demands. Current publisher-imposed terms do not allow for libraries to sustainably grow their collections to support Canadian users' needs.

In addition to proper funding, altering current licensing models and imposing a baseline set of conditions onto publishing grants should be considered. This will support the digitization of Canadian content, and provide government support to Canadian content producers including musicians and authors.

At present, libraries are struggling to pay for licensing of online resources, and are thus facing challenges serving a clientele that increasingly seeks digitized works. Canadians are being asked to stay home, and libraries are struggling to keep up with the growing demand for online resources. Federal funding to support Canadian libraries purchase more licenses will improve access, and support more Canadian-made content.

CFLA-FCAB recommends that the government invest \$30 million in the fair and equitable access to online materials so that Canadians can continue following public health and safety measures following the COVID-19 pandemic.