



Vancouver Public Library

MANAGEMENT REPORT

Date: June 12, 2019
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VanDocs#: DOC/2019/158463
Meeting Date: June 26, 2019

TO: VPL Board
FROM: Kay Cahill, Director, Collections & Technology
SUBJECT: **Canadian Urban Libraries Council eContent Government Relations Campaign**

SUMMARY

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) has launched a new phase of their campaign to raise awareness of issues that are restricting public library access to digital content. Following the successful #eContentforLibraries social media campaign in January, the current phase focuses on political advocacy and raising awareness among municipal and federal officials in an effort to attract attention, gain public support, and generate political will to seek a Canada-wide solution that will assist libraries in providing core digital services to communities.

PURPOSE

This report is for decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the VPL Board support the CULC eContent Government Advocacy campaign by:

- 1) Providing a draft proposed motion for Vancouver City Council consideration in support of digital content advocacy.
- 2) Individual trustees sending letters to Vancouver-based Members of Parliament to raise awareness of issues affecting digital content access and generate political support for a solution.

POLICY

The campaign aligns with VPL's [Collection Development Policy](#), which includes: "It is vital for the library to monitor and respond to developments in content provision technology. Content is our primary consideration, we select formats that provide for communities that require alternate formats as well as facilitate the most convenient access for the majority of our users."

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The campaign is in alignment with VPL's work toward the strategic outcome *Access and Equity*, and Initiative 3.1: Increase access and ease of use in branches, online, and in the community.

BACKGROUND

For background on the key issues that prevent public libraries from offering immediate access to the full range of digital content that is available in print, the January eContent for Libraries social media campaign, and VPL's past role in digital content advocacy, please see the [January 16, 2018 Board report](#) on the Canadian Urban Libraries Council eContent for Libraries Campaign.

Results of the #eContentforLibraries Campaign

The #eContentforLibraries campaign ran from January 14th – 25th, with participation from public libraries across the country. Results included:

- 128,260 Twitter impressions
- 49,396 Facebook impressions
- 15,404 reached on Instagram
- 2,103 views on linked in
- 23,000 visits to econtentforlibraries.com
- Multinational publishers specifically mentioned in over 700 unique tweets

In addition to participating in the planning of the campaign through the CULC Digital Content Working Group, Director of Collections and Technology Kay Cahill and VPL Marketing & Communications staff responded to local media enquiries and prompted social media discussions among patrons.

During the second week of the campaign, Penguin Random House reached out to CULC to discuss the issues highlighted in the campaign. As a result they have committed to setting up a Canadian

advisory board of librarians, and to checking and acquiring Canadian rights for audiobook titles that are available in US libraries but not in Canada.

DISCUSSION

Government Relations Campaign

The new phase of the CULC campaign seeks to build on the momentum generated by the social media campaign by focusing advocacy efforts on municipal and federal political leaders in order to raise awareness of the issues, increase public support, and generate political will to seek a solution that will give public libraries fair access to digital publications.

It is CULC's hope that the representatives of member libraries, including VPL, will be able to build on their existing relationships with municipal leaders to increase local government understanding of the digital access issues and their implications, and ultimately to have municipalities pass and forward resolutions to members of the Federal Parliament and Federal Election 2019 candidates. This will build a foundation for federal action on the digital publications issue that will ultimately benefit both library patrons and Canadian authors.

CULC is also currently developing a more targeted strategy for direct outreach to members of the Federal Parliament and key Cabinet Ministers, with a goal of building bipartisan support and agreement for the need for Canadian public libraries to have robust digital collections. Particular emphasis will be placed on the role that libraries have in supporting the most vulnerable populations in our society, and the need to ensure fair and equitable access to digital content for these users.

Key messages for municipal and federal leaders include:

- Canadian public libraries face an increasing struggle to obtain digital publications from multinational publishers, due to prohibitive costs and restrictive licensing models.
- Barriers to access and purchase of digital publications hamper our capacity to provide modern, digitized library service.
- The demographics that are particularly affected when public libraries cannot provide access to digital content include vulnerable populations and groups who rely on libraries for participation in their communities, including seniors, low income families, youth, and new Canadians.
- We are asking municipal leaders, Members of Parliament and Federal Election 2019 candidates to recognize that libraries serve important demographic groups by providing access to materials that allow them to learn and grow, and to help us advocate for solutions to the barriers that Canadian libraries currently face in accessing digital publications.

Staff recommend that the VPL Board take the steps described in the recommendations to endorse CULC's sustained advocacy efforts and support the goals of the campaign.

A draft proposed motion is included as Appendix 1 and a sample letter is included as Appendix 2.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

FINAL REMARKS

Publishers, primarily headquartered outside Canada, are limiting access to digital publications in Canadian libraries through restrictive licensing models and prohibitive pricing. These restrictions and costs make it difficult for libraries to provide important services that contribute to thriving and engaged communities, and disproportionately affect some of the most vulnerable groups of library users. By supporting the CULC eContent campaign through the actions recommended in this report the VPL Board can assist in raising awareness, increasing public support, and generating political will to seek a Canada-wide solution to this ongoing challenge.

APPENDIX ONE

Draft motion in support of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council eContent advocacy campaign:

Motion to Vancouver City Council: Stronger Digital Content for Public Libraries

Vancouver Public Library Recommendations

That Vancouver City Council:

1. Recognize the important role that public libraries play in the community through early literacy programs that are critical building blocks for life-long health and well-being, and digital literacy programs that enable participation in the digital world;
2. Recognize that public libraries must be able to offer digital publications to their customers as part of their core service offering to the community, particularly given the digital divide and the rapid pace of digitization of educational and cultural materials;
3. Indicate its support for the Vancouver Public Library and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council in efforts to increase access to digital publications for public library customers in the City of Vancouver and across Canada;
4. Call on the Federal government to investigate the barriers faced by public libraries in acquiring digital publications and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada; and,
5. Further ask the Federal government to develop a solution that increases access to digital publications across Canada and assists public libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire digital publications.

APPENDIX TWO

Proposed Text for Letter to Federal Members of Parliament

I am writing on behalf of the Vancouver Public Library to seek support and endorsement in helping to solve an issue that is impacting our ability to provide service to library users.

Libraries and the early literacy programs that they run are integral to developing proficient readers and ensuring that children have the critical building blocks for life-long health and well-being. More and more, digital literacy programs run by public libraries also help ensure that our community members can participate in our digital world. Additionally, for many who are struggling with affordability, including seniors, lower income families, youth, and new Canadians, our public libraries provide access to information they may not otherwise be able to obtain.

Members of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) spend approximately \$100 million in public funds annually on library acquisitions. In Vancouver we will be spending \$4.9 million in 2019 to ensure that we acquire publications and other resources in demand by library users.

Even with this significant expenditure, we increasingly struggle to obtain adequate copies of digital publications from multinational publishers, due to other cost pressures we face locally and because of the often-strict licensing limitations applied to digital publications. By way of example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book *Kingdom of the Blind* is available to libraries for \$13 as a paperback, \$22 in hard cover and \$60 in digital form. The \$60 cost would allow the book to be checked out electronically 52 times or for 2 years – whichever happens first. A paper edition would be expected to last 3 to 4 years at a substantially lower cost. The book is currently not available to Canadian libraries in any digital audio format.

The critical problem is that multinational publishers are limiting access to digital publications by Canadian libraries, and, even when a publication is made available, are making it prohibitively expensive to acquire most digital publications in quantities that meet the needs of our communities.

If we cannot effectively serve library users and provide access to digital publications, our community will suffer. The lack of access to digital publications is a problem we feel governments need to be aware of and help us develop solutions to – especially as governments seek to identify community tools that can help vulnerable groups grow and reach their potential.

Along with other CULC/CBUC members across Canada, Vancouver Public Library is asking the Federal government to recognize the critical role that libraries play in serving our communities. Libraries do this by providing access to materials that allow community members to learn and grow. The Federal government has a vital role to play in ensuring that Canadian libraries can meet

the growing demand for digital publications. We ask you to prioritize finding a solution for the barriers that Canadian libraries face in accessing digital publications.

I would be happy to further discuss these concerns with you at your convenience.