



April 16, 2009

Province strengthens library access through increased funding

39 per cent increase to help improve collaboration, innovation and technology

Edmonton... The Government of Alberta aims to strengthen library services for all Albertans with a 39 per cent increase in public library funding beginning in 2009.

The funding increase supports a new vision for the public library system, which is focused on building seamless access to information and services through Alberta's public library network.

"This is an investment in Albertans," said Premier Ed Stelmach. "We want to help libraries provide seamless access to books, resources and people for the benefit of all Albertans no matter where they live, work or read."

Budget 2009 allocates \$32 million for public libraries - a \$9 million increase over last year. Of this increase, \$7 million will go directly to local library boards and regional library systems to deliver basic library services and respond to community needs. The remaining \$2 million increase will be invested in technology, helping further the new vision as well as promoting collaboration and innovation within the library network.

"This means someone in Hanna will have the same access to books, programs and DVDs as someone in Calgary," said Municipal Affairs Minister, Ray Danyluk. "To improve access to library services we plan to harness technology and help libraries work together. It just makes sense."

Alberta's vision for libraries builds on feedback heard through extensive MLA-led consultations with library stakeholders last fall.

"Through our consultations, we encountered many Albertans who are passionate and committed to quality library service in their communities," says Jeff Johnson, MLA for Athabasca-Redwater and chair of the MLA Committee. "We appreciate their ideas on how to create a solid framework for world-class public library service for Albertans."

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Backgrounder: MLA Committee Library Report

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MLA Committee Library Report

MLA Library Committee History

In August 2008, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Ray Danyluk, established an MLA Committee on the Future of Public Library Service in Alberta. Jeff Johnson, MLA for Athabasca-Redwater, was appointed as Chair, and Fred Horne, MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, and Teresa Woo-Paw, MLA for Calgary-Mackay, as members.

The MLA committee was asked to recommend specific actions in which the government could support libraries by building on the established base of library service; promoting collaboration and innovation; and capitalizing on technology.

The MLA Committee attended 11 consultation sessions across the province during September and October 2008. Hundreds of library stakeholders - library professionals, staff and trustees, municipal leaders, educators, volunteers, government officials and MLAs - shared their ideas and opinions on how the province can best support libraries.

The MLA Committee's final report includes 18 recommendations that fall under four categories:

- create an overarching library policy;
- support a province-wide public library system;
- promote collaboration and innovation; and
- capitalize on technology.

The government has accepted 15 of the recommendations and accepted, in-principle, the remaining three recommendations.

Summary of recommendation

Create an overarching library policy

Recommendation 1

Create an integrated library policy to guide decision-making and strategic planning and investments for libraries.

Government response

Accept. The government will involve several ministries (including Municipal Affairs, Service Alberta, Advanced Education and Technology, Education, Culture and Community Spirit, Employment and Immigration, and Aboriginal Relations) in establishing an integrated library policy for all publicly-funded libraries.

Support a strong, province-wide public library service

Recommendation 2

Increase provincial per-capita funding to 2009 levels for municipal library boards and regional library systems.

Accept. Through an amendment to the grant regulation, an increase of \$7 million will go to library boards and regional library systems.

Recommendation 3

Tie library funding to conditions established by the Public Library Services branch in Municipal Affairs.

Accept-in-principle. The province will work with libraries to ensure the autonomy of regional and municipal library systems is respected as standards are developed to assess the efficacy of government funding and measure progress towards a seamless, accessible province-wide library system.

Recommendation 4

Acknowledge the significant role municipalities play in funding Alberta's libraries and encourage municipalities, at a minimum, to maintain current levels of funding.

Accept. The government acknowledges municipalities' significant contribution to the funding of Alberta's public libraries.

Recommendation 5

Provide a stronger base level of funding to small municipal libraries (under 3000 people) that are struggling to meet minimum levels of service under current funding requirements.

Accept. More than 140 libraries serving less than 3000 people will share a total of \$1.2 million in operating grants.

Recommendation 6

The Public Library Services branch take a broader leadership role.

Accept. The Public Library Services branch in Municipal Affairs will take more of a leadership role in developing policy and planning for publicly-funded libraries.

Recommendation 7

Enhance the role of The Alberta Library (TAL) and ask it to develop minimum province-wide standards and best practices for library services.

Accept-in-principle. TAL is an autonomous, not-for-profit corporation. Municipal Affairs will initiate discussions with TAL on potential ways for its role to be enhanced or expanded.

Recommendation 8

Enhance the role of regional library systems to increase service and support to the municipal libraries in their regions.

Promote collaboration and innovation**Recommendation 9**

Establish a standing committee of assistant deputy ministers (ADM) to coordinate government policies and program initiatives that impact publicly-funded libraries.

Recommendation 10

Designate public libraries with innovative programs, services or technologies as centres of excellence. Package and share their expertise.

Recommendation 11

Actively find ways for public libraries and schools to work together on student supports, co-location, staffing, literacy, and sharing of resources, including videoconferencing.

Recommendation 12

Encourage public libraries to formalize meetings between all library stakeholders and partners (e.g. not-for-profit organizations, community groups, local provincial government offices, etc.) to avoid duplication of service.

Accept-in-principle. The province's role would be to facilitate discussions between regional library systems and municipal libraries to increase services and support.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will establish an ADM Standing Committee with representation from Service Alberta, Advanced Education and Technology, Education, Culture and Community Spirit, Employment and Immigration, and Aboriginal Relations.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will establish an Advisory Committee that on an annual basis:

- identifies innovative public library programs, services or technologies;
- documents best practices; and
- develops and coordinates an annual awards program.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will continue to participate in the School Library Review. Municipal Affairs will actively encourage municipalities to consider co-location of libraries and school libraries in new subdivisions.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will help libraries develop and implement mechanisms to improve communication between library stakeholders and partners.

Recommendation 13

Hold formal meetings with the federal government and First Nations and Métis settlements so they can be included in the vision of seamless access to public library services.

Accept. Municipal Affairs (working with Aboriginal Relations) will initiate discussion between First Nations and Métis stakeholders and the federal government on Aboriginal library services.

Capitalize on Technology**Recommendation 14**

Develop a province-wide technology plan to create seamless access, including a single library card available to all Albertans.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will work cooperatively with TAL in developing a province-wide technology plan.

Recommendation 15

Plan, develop and implement videoconferencing services with other public organizations in communities.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will work with TAL to ensure libraries have access to videoconferencing facilities, avoiding duplication of taxpayer investment.

Recommendation 16

Explore opportunities with TAL to pilot emerging technologies in public libraries.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will collaborate with TAL on realizing its potential to be a pilot organization for emerging technologies.

Recommendation 17

Provide access to and purchase licenses for all electronic databases on a provincial (rather than a municipal or regional) basis.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will collaborate with TAL to expand database access, taking into account the costs and benefits of enhancing access to highly-specialized resources.

Recommendation 18

Ensure all libraries have high-speed Internet access.

Accept. Municipal Affairs will work with TAL to ensure the remaining 11 (of 310) libraries without high-speed Internet access obtain it.

Key Library Facts

- Alberta's public library system consists of public (municipal) libraries, regional library systems, academic libraries, government libraries, school libraries and the Alberta Library.
- Alberta's public libraries consist of 310 municipal libraries, administered and governed by 227 municipal library boards.

- 51% of adult Albertans have used a public library in the last 12 months.
- 27% of adult Albertans are estimated to have accessed public library service via the Internet in the last 12 months.
- 47% of adult Albertans expect to access public library service via the Internet over the next 12 months.

*Source: *Research Innovations Inc. 2007*

To find more information, visit www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca.

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