

*Report of the
Literacy & Lifelong Learning Working Group*



*Strengthening the Saskatchewan public library system's role
in promoting, delivering and supporting literacy and lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

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Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, literacy provision in Saskatchewan has been defined, to a great extent, by provincial funding policies and historical funding relationships that have favoured post secondary institutions and community based organizations. In recent years, the provincial funding approach to literacy has expanded to include a new model that has placed greater emphasis on supporting partnership-based “learning communities” that are poised to develop locally responsive approaches to community literacy needs. Public libraries in Saskatchewan have played an important role, formally and informally, in supporting communities and community literacy for over a hundred years. However, they have not been funded or recognized for the leadership and resources they bring to strengthening community literacy development.

The purpose of this report is to provide a vision for the role of public libraries in literacy and lifelong learning for the people of Saskatchewan. It lists a series of recommendations for Saskatchewan provincial government, municipalities, public library systems, and the First Nations and Aboriginal library community. This report is also of interest to literacy stakeholders. Recommendations focus on leadership, funding, infrastructure, staffing, and partnerships.

The report recommends a coordinated approach based on a provincial strategy and policy created by the Provincial Library and Literacy Office in cooperation with the public library sector, with standard expectations of literacy programming in public libraries. Funding support is envisioned to come from diverse sources including federal, provincial, and municipal grants.

Recommendations include that: the ten library systems will incorporate literacy and lifelong learning into their strategic plans and have at least one literacy coordinator position among their staff; the library systems will create an action plan which addresses the facilities, programming activities, and staff/volunteer training required to conduct literacy and lifelong learning initiatives; and public libraries will measure the impact of their literacy efforts in their communities for better accountability. The entire vision will be imbued with a united advocacy effort for literacy in the province.

Partnerships may include Aboriginal groups and First Nations, literacy organizations, English as an Additional Languages groups, immigration agencies, early childhood education groups, reading circles, schools, social service agencies, employment and business groups, and colleges.

Background on the development of the report is provided. A list of recommendations is found at the end.

Background

“...literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all ...”

(United Nations, Resolution 56/116 (vii), 2001)¹

Public libraries are dedicated to creating equitable environments that support and promote basic education for all, and play a vital role in supporting individuals and communities in their literacy and learning aspirations. Public libraries are unique public institutions that have been serving Saskatchewan communities for more than 100 years. Throughout this time, they have been a continuing driver in the educational, recreational, and cultural development of their communities.

Up to this point, public libraries were well known to their public as suppliers of high quality learning materials, but their direct role in improving literacy skills was less recognized. Public libraries have always believed that they have a role in supporting and promoting literacy and learning and are engaged in literacy activities on a daily basis. In 2007, public library directors in Saskatchewan recommended a province-wide public library consultation, recognizing that it was time for public libraries to examine their current role in literacy and lifelong learning.

The Public Libraries Act, 1996 indicates that basic library services include the development of programs to meet local needs related to awareness of library resources, information competencies, new ideas, and library values. The directors of the ten public library systems acknowledged that the provincial public library system needed to evolve to meet the changing learning and information needs of their communities. Opportunities exist for public libraries to build on their unique strengths and respond to current trends and the needs of the current and future Saskatchewan library user including:

- The new, broader definition of literacy among citizens in a knowledge-based society where new technology and its effective use is critical;
- The centrality of lifelong learning to every resident’s ability to thrive and contribute to the growing economy;
- The importance of literacy in the successful participation of Aboriginal people in the province;
- The needs of new immigrants for improved skills in Canada’s official languages and effective integration in their new homeland; and
- The willingness of library staff to embrace this broader scope of literacy activity as part of their mandate and daily operations.

¹ Available at: <http://www.un-documents.net/a56r116.htm>.

Library directors saw the need for greater recognition of the role public libraries play to ensure sufficient resources are present to meet public expectations relative to literacy. They also wanted clarity on that role to ensure that libraries are a part of the solution to the literacy challenges facing the province. Library trustees and decision-makers have heard recent statistics about literacy in Saskatchewan. For example, a 2008 Statistics Canada study revealed that 70% of off-reserve Aboriginal people score below the benchmark required to cope effectively in a knowledge-based economy and that, in Saskatchewan, a majority of these urban-based First Nations and Métis people do not have the literacy skills to cope in today's society². In addition, it has been found that across Canada, adults aged 16 to 65, about 9 million, or 42% scored below Level 3 in prose literacy - the desired threshold for coping with the increasing skill demands of a knowledge society.³

Library directors and decision-makers believe that public libraries play a role in improving Saskatchewan's literacy outlook. To move forward on this goal, a Literacy and Lifelong Learning Working Group was established to lead a series of workshop consultations with key stakeholders across the province. Participants in the workshops (including library trustees, library staff, local library boards and relevant organizations) investigated the increased potential of public libraries as places of literacy and lifelong learning and examined whether the public library role needed to change to meet community needs and government expectations.

² Bougie, E. 2008. Literacy profile of off-reserve First Nations and Métis people living in urban Manitoba and Saskatchewan: Results from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2007005/article/10500-eng.htm>.

³ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Statistics Canada, 2005. Building on our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-617-x/89-617x2005001-eng.pdf>.

A Vision for Public Libraries in Literacy and Lifelong Learning

The Literacy and Lifelong Learning Working Group developed a vision framework based on the results of the consultations and the knowledge each member brings from their day-to-day work. The following points are the elements identified that form the vision:

An integrated, formalized structure: Literacy and lifelong learning in libraries is supported by formal structures (such as The Public Libraries Act, strategic plans, etc.) that formalize partnerships and the public library role in the overall literacy strategy of the province.

Province-wide leadership and coordination: Provincial coordination of resources, training and policies supports the public library sector in building connections and demonstrating leadership in literacy and learning.

Realistic, suitable accountability: Public libraries measure the impact of their literacy initiatives on their communities within the context of their current capacities.

Responsive community partnerships: Public libraries work with their communities to support and enhance local initiatives, in coordination with existing networks.

A community-focused program: Public libraries are responsive to their diverse communities, offering ongoing literacy and lifelong learning programs that support individuals and organizations, and promote development of their local communities.

Equitable inclusive opportunities: Public libraries offer resources that support literacy in all formats, and of all types. They are responsive to and comfortable working with the disenfranchised in society and are a face in the community – bridging the journey into the library.

A culturally diverse approach: Public libraries are cultural centers in our communities that support both their staff and the public in learning about other ways of knowing.

United, bold advocates: Public libraries across the province have one voice for literacy that is reflected in all of our actions.

Recommendations

A. Summary of recommendations

For the Ministry of Education:

- That the Ministry of Education be invited to endorse this report in principle;
- That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office take a leadership role in facilitating the planning, development and implementation of:
 - Province-wide library initiatives related to literacy and lifelong learning;
 - Agreed-upon province-wide expectations for library-based literacy programming; and,
 - Agreed-upon province-wide standards for the library facilities that would support literacy programming.
- That the public library sector be consulted regarding learning programmes and services that impact on or can be delivered by public libraries;
- That the Ministry of Education provide the necessary resources to ensure that a province-wide policy approach and action plan is developed for public library literacy and lifelong learning services;
- That the Ministry of Education establish a sustainable literacy funding framework for public library literacy and learning services and programmes that would help to stabilize the delivery of these services across the province on an equitable basis;
- That the Ministry of Education explore the development of regulations under *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* that will clearly mandate public library involvement in literacy activities and provide funding for those activities;
- That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office in partnership with the provincial public library system assess public library needs and develop an action plan to ensure that the necessary resources are in place to respond to the literacy and lifelong learning needs of their communities;
- That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office work with the public library sector and learning sector partners to enhance dialogue and collaboration on literacy and lifelong learning initiatives.
- That the Ministry of Education develop a provincial literacy strategy with the full participation of the ten public library systems, public library trustees, and the First Nations and Aboriginal library community.

For Public Library Systems:

- That the ten public library systems be invited to endorse this report in principle;
- That the public library systems continue to articulate and promote an understanding of the role of libraries in literacy and lifelong learning to the provincial public library system and to others concerned with literacy;
- That each public library system integrate literacy and lifelong learning into the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives statements within their strategic plan;
- That the provincial public library system, in partnership with the Provincial Library and Literacy Office, assess public library needs and develop an action plan to ensure that the necessary resources are in place to respond to the literacy and lifelong learning needs of their communities;
- That every regional library system have at least one dedicated literacy coordinator position on their staff, and that municipal library systems have a fully staffed literacy unit;
- That the public library sector support and participate widely in multi-sector groups involved with literacy and lifelong learning services;
- That the public library sector contribute to the development of a provincial literacy strategy.

For Municipalities:

- That the municipal appointees on public library boards be encouraged to support the need for literacy and lifelong learning work in their local branch/ community libraries and designate appropriate allocation of library system funding to undertake this work;
- That the municipal appointees on public library boards contribute to the development of a provincial literacy strategy.

For the First Nations and Aboriginal Library Community:

- That the First Nations and Aboriginal library community be invited to endorse this report in principle;
- That the First Nations and Aboriginal library community, municipal appointees, and libraries be invited to contribute to the development of a provincial literacy strategy.

B. Recommendations in Detail

- 1. That the ten public library systems, the First Nations and Aboriginal library community and the Ministry of Education be invited to endorse this report in principle.**

LEADERSHIP

- 2. That Provincial Library and Literacy Office take a leadership role in the planning, development and implementation of:**
 - **Province-wide library initiatives related to literacy and lifelong learning;**
 - **Agreed-upon province-wide expectations for library-based literacy programming; and,**
 - **Agreed-upon province-wide standards for the library facilities that would support literacy programming.**

One barrier identified through the consultation was the inconsistency of programming due to high staff turnover and the dependence on volunteer time to develop and implement programs. Research done in many other sectors indicates it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on volunteerism, and this is true in libraries. These concerns are especially poignant for the regional and northern library systems where dependence on volunteers for programming is the status quo. *The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996* indicates the provision of a basic level of library service in Saskatchewan includes “providing appropriately qualified and trained staff to assist the public to use library resources and services.” With a stronger role in literacy and lifelong learning, and to deliver a sustainable, consistent service, staffing standards are needed.

Another concern which emerged from the consultations was the lack of space in library facilities to offer existing programmes or to expand programming activities. Standards are needed which will help define proper library space requirements. An evaluation process is required to assess existing facilities and set goals for their improvement.

In addition, a set of standards for library programming and an evaluation process for those programmes, relative to the standards, are needed.

The Public Libraries Act, 1996 provides the Ministry of Education with the authority to develop standards for library facilities (83k) and to describe basic library services (83b).

- 2.1. That the public library sector be consulted regarding learning programs and services that impact on or can be delivered by public libraries (i.e. settlement and immigrant services, English as an Additional Language training, etc.).**

The public library sector can play a role in collaborating with government ministries offering programmes and services for newcomers to Saskatchewan and other groups with high literacy and learning needs. Communication is an important way to prevent gaps in service delivery. Libraries are well connected to their communities. They need to be aware of government programmes and services to avoid duplication of effort.

2.2. That the public library sector, including the library systems, library trustees and the First Nations and Aboriginal Library Community, be a part of the development of a provincial literacy strategy.

Public libraries need to be a part of a long-term strategy for literacy development and embracing lifelong learning. They are logical access points for resources and programmes that support literate environments in communities and in homes. They are the only provider in the education sector that can offer learning opportunities to all Saskatchewan residents, without exclusion.

The ten public library systems are strategically located across the province to provide equitable services efficiently. They represent a valuable network of 306 learning centres with the potential for reaching citizens in all communities, from the largest to the smallest and most isolated.

FUNDING

3. That the municipal appointees on public library boards be encouraged to support the need for literacy and lifelong learning work in their local branch community libraries and designate an appropriate allocation of library system funding to undertake this work.

Municipalities are required to participate in the provincial public library system and municipal grants are the major funding source for local library services. Municipalities are also responsible for ensuring adequate facilities for their local libraries. To assist their local libraries in pursuing a larger role in literacy and learning, the working group recommends that municipal appointees advocate that an appropriate allocation of the grant be used for literacy and lifelong learning activities.

4. That the Ministry of Education provide the necessary resources to ensure that a province-wide policy approach and action plan is developed for public library literacy and lifelong learning programming that responds to the needs of the community.

Provincial coordination and leadership can provide the province-wide framework that can build on public library success into the future. A policy approach to literacy and lifelong learning in public libraries can guide decision-making about relevant programming and facility standards, target outcomes, and facilitate partnerships. Strategies need to build on the strengths of the public library system.

Currently, libraries are unevenly resourced to offer sustainable high-quality literacy and learning programmes and services. As a result, many in the library community are left without a vision of what good library programming is and what valuable support public libraries can offer; the public receives intermittent and inconsistent literacy services. The development of a broad policy framework will help standardize delivery of these services.

In addition, the nature and scale of the work is such that local efforts are not capable of meeting the needs of the public. They lack the economy of scale, the pools of learners, and the financial and human resources to be successful. Regional coordination is often required to produce a good result at the community level, and provincial coordination is needed to ensure a good result among regions.

Saskatchewan libraries are a rich resource of materials and personal service. They have the potential to reach people of all ages with learning opportunities, especially where gaps exist in the education system: for babies and toddlers, pre-Kindergarten and after formal schooling. These opportunities include the development of skills in locating, reading, and evaluating information effectively for full participation in society and an improved quality of life.

4.1. That the Ministry of Education establish a sustainable funding framework for public library literacy and lifelong learning services and programmes that would help to stabilize the delivery of literacy services across the province on an equitable and fair basis.

Most public libraries that do literacy work, apply for external grants to fund literacy projects. In the consultations which created this report, much concern was expressed over the common experience of designing and implementing successful programmes which are eventually cancelled due to unstable funding. It is important that literacy efforts receive stable, continuous funding, just as other education efforts do. Short term grants and initiatives help, but are insufficient for successful long-term literacy and lifelong learning efforts. The establishment of a provincial funding pool will provide the stability needed to offer a consistent level of service and programming. It could also be used for leveraging additional funds from other sources. An investment in the public library network for this purpose will blanket the province with quality literacy and lifelong learning activities.

Under *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* library systems are empowered to be actively involved in literacy activities (Articles 67 & 68) and the Ministry of Education is empowered to make regulations with respect to such activities (Article 83).

4.2. That the Ministry of Education explore the development of regulations under *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* that will clearly mandate public library involvement in literacy activities and provide funding for those activities ensuring a consistent basic library literacy service across the province.

The optimum sustainable strategy for literacy and lifelong learning in public libraries will involve literacy regulations that will empower public libraries with other literacy providers and provide a sustainable long-term funding framework for province-wide literacy activities in public libraries.

FORMAL STRUCTURE

5. That the public library systems continue to articulate and promote an understanding of the role of libraries in literacy and lifelong learning to the provincial public library system and to others concerned with literacy.

The consultation process has increased awareness, but there is still work to be done both internally and externally. Part of the overall strategy for library systems will be to advocate among municipalities, First Nations and Aboriginal people, and within government. Advocacy is also needed in the library community about the role public libraries play in literacy and lifelong learning. Libraries have a strong foundation in their commitment to traditional values of library service from which to do the work, but the consultations revealed that additional education for staff members and the wider community is needed to expand their view of literacy and the potential for a fuller range of literacy activities.

5.1. That every public library system integrate literacy and lifelong learning into the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives statements within the system strategic plan.

Public libraries continue to be strong champions of literacy and are actively engaged in the delivery of services which promote, support and enhance literacy and lifelong learning for the people of Saskatchewan. They offer resources, programmes and services, either alone or in partnership with other agencies, to ensure that their local communities have access to the information, ideas and learning opportunities they need, such as:

- Storytimes and early childhood literacy activities, often with parents/caregivers;
- Co-operative programming with community literacy and EAL organizations;
- EAL training for individuals, and train the tutor programmes for instructors;
- Summer Reading Programmes;
- Every Child Ready to Read;
- Programmes which target fathers and their boys;
- Reading and conversation circles;
- Aboriginal language instruction;
- One-on-one, small group, and classroom-style instruction in reading, writing, and computer skills;

- Information literacy workshops introducing people to e-library, Internet, email, job-hunting skills;
- Workplace literacy skills;
- Train the tutor workshops;
- Literacy skills for seniors.

Several Saskatchewan library systems currently reflect their role in literacy through their strategic plan. For example, Southeast Regional Library’s mission is “To provide the residents of south eastern Saskatchewan with the resources and experiences that foster a lifetime of imagination, discovery and learning”, and Saskatoon Public Library’s includes the phrases “a place that supports continuous learning” and “increase the level of literacy in the community.”

Public libraries have a responsibility to know and appeal to the interests and curiosities of their community through their programmes, services, and collections. A more conscious approach to such efforts can occur if literacy and lifelong learning are positioned as part of the strategic framework for each library system. By clarifying a focus and aligning goals, the impact of the provincial library system can surpass the sum of its parts.

5.2. That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office in partnership with the provincial public library system assess public library needs and develop an action plan to ensure that the necessary facilities, programming, and human resources are in place to respond to the literacy and lifelong learning needs of their communities.

Participants in the consultative process identified resources, skilled staff and facilities as key barriers to providing or expanding sustainable library programmes in support of literacy and lifelong learning. Most public libraries lack programming space in which to conduct literacy activities properly. More importantly, participants identified a lack of staff with the level of skill necessary to offer quality programming to meet the needs of diverse library clientele. A majority of the libraries consulted reported they could not keep pace with public demand or provide the width and depth of services that their communities require.

The Public Libraries Regulations, 1996 outlines a range of services that public libraries are to provide. Under the leadership of the Provincial Library and Literacy Office, a detailed and thorough inventory of the ten public library systems could reveal gaps in service. An investigation of the currently available literacy and lifelong learning services and the relationship of these services to facilities and human resources [paid and unpaid] is needed so that individual resource plans can be developed to address the gaps.

STAFFING

- 6. That the Ministry of Education provide funding through the resource sharing grants to ensure that every regional library system have at least one dedicated literacy coordinator position at their headquarters and that the municipal library systems each have a fully staffed literacy unit.**

The public library sector is the only province-wide delivery system that offers learning resources and opportunities to residents across the lifelong learning spectrum – babies, young children, students, adults, and seniors. Programming is an essential support to the learning needs of library users of all ages. Many libraries across the province offer programmes, either alone or in partnerships with other agencies, to ensure that their local communities have access to literacy and learning opportunities. Some libraries have literacy agencies sited in their buildings. But many libraries are also unable to offer consistent, reliable learning programmes, or can only provide them intermittently. In all parts of the province, library staff have identified the need for enhanced training in literacy skills to assist the increasingly diverse population of library users.

A dedicated literacy coordinator will support and enhance the current staff skill set in each library system, through training events and by providing expertise. They can also provide a foundation and templates for literacy and learning services. This position can also ensure that the literacy and learning needs of the public are identified and reflected in services and programmes at local branches, and measure the impact of library literacy activities. The literacy coordinator in regions will strengthen local services, encourage locally-based, but regionally-coordinated initiatives. The coordinator will support and better inform branch staff.

The working group heard many suggestions during their consultations for programming and services that could enhance literacy and that could be carried out through public library service points. A literacy coordinator will create an action plan to pursue these suggestions.

In municipal library systems, literacy coordinators will help manage some of the increasing demand for services, especially those in relation to newcomers, and will help with training other library staff or community organizations to likewise cope with the demand. Municipal libraries are being asked to expand services which help newcomers adapt to their environment. To do this, additional staff effort is required – whether through partnerships in the community or through direct service at the library. Some of the most successful libraries in Canada are excelling at this service to newcomers.

With literacy coordinators in place, libraries will reach out to their communities more intensively to ensure no one is falling through the cracks, and that everyone has the opportunity to improve their literacy skills.

PARTNERSHIPS

7. That the public library sector support and participate widely in multi-sector groups involved with literacy and lifelong learning services.

Public libraries have a record of collaboration with their communities. Through cooperative, balanced, shared participation and interaction between library representatives and other groups, public libraries strengthen their role in education. They work with others in the learning sector to integrate knowledge-based activities in their service area.

The consultations found that library services are known and appreciated by current partners, but there are still many sectors and groups that have limited awareness of the public library or underestimate the scope of library services. For example, it was stated by one consultation participant that the literacy and library communities are separate entities with little understanding of each other. Greater interaction among groups serving learners, of all varieties, can promote awareness and understanding and ensure that sectors are working in complementary ways.

Public libraries have a central role in outreach and resource sharing among schools, colleges, social service agencies, community groups, literacy groups, early learning organizations, immigrant groups, and the Aboriginal community. This role can help libraries determine community needs and develop with others a solid response.

One of the ways libraries can play a coordinating role is by making staff available on an ongoing basis for planning literacy and lifelong learning services, assessing the impact of changes in the economy, and helping build strong and viable communities.

7.1. That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office work with the public library sector and learning sector partners to enhance dialogue and collaboration on literacy and lifelong learning initiatives.

A continuous dialogue between learning sector partners is essential in creating innovative and sustainable initiatives which can affect the learning outcomes of Saskatchewan residents. To find their appropriate role in the unique web of social agencies which characterize each community, libraries will benefit from improved communication and sharing of knowledge and resources with community agencies involved in literacy and lifelong learning. A process that facilitates communication and relationship-building with those involved in the development of literacy and lifelong learning programmes will ensure the full range of community needs is identified, and that library programmes and services meet these community needs without a duplication of services. Opportunities such as forums, workshops, training or other collaborative events can ensure that literacy and lifelong learning services in public libraries complement community resources.

List of Recommendations

1. That the ten public library systems, the First Nations and Aboriginal library community and the Ministry of Education be invited to endorse this report in principle.
2. That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office take a leadership role in the planning, development and implementation of:
 - Province-wide library initiatives related to literacy and lifelong learning;
 - Agreed-upon province-wide expectations for library-based literacy programming; and,
 - Agreed-upon province-wide standards for the library facilities that would support literacy programming.
 - 2.1. That the public library sector be consulted regarding learning programmes and services that impact on or can be delivered by public libraries.
 - 2.2. That the public library sector including the library systems, library trustees and the First Nations and Aboriginal library community be a part of the development of a provincial literacy strategy.
3. That the municipal appointees on public library boards be encouraged to support literacy and lifelong learning work in their local branch/community libraries and designate appropriate allocation of library system funding to undertake this work.
4. That the Ministry of Education provide the necessary resources to ensure that a province-wide policy approach and action plan is developed for public library literacy and lifelong learning programming that responds to the needs of the community.
 - 4.1. That the Ministry of Education establish a sustainable funding framework for public library literacy and lifelong learning services and programmes that would help to stabilize the delivery of literacy services across the province on an equitable and fair basis.
 - 4.2. That the Ministry of Education explore the development of regulations under *The Public Libraries Act, 1996* that will clearly mandate public library involvement in literacy activities and provide funding for those activities ensuring a consistent basic library literacy service across the province.
5. That the public library systems continue to articulate and promote an understanding of the role of libraries in literacy and lifelong learning to the provincial public library system and to others concerned with literacy.

- 5.1. That every public library system integrate literacy and lifelong learning into the vision, mission, values, goals and objectives statements within the system strategic plan.
- 5.2. That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office, in partnership with the provincial public library system, assess public library needs and develop an action plan to ensure that the necessary facilities, programming, and human resources are in place to respond to the literacy and lifelong learning needs of their communities.
6. That the Ministry of Education provide funding through the resource sharing grants to ensure that every regional library system have at least one dedicated literacy coordinator position at their headquarters and that the municipal library systems each have a fully staffed literacy unit.
7. That the public library sector support and participate widely in multi-sector groups involved with literacy and lifelong learning services.
 - 7.1. That the Provincial Library and Literacy Office work with the public library sector and learning sector partners to enhance dialogue and collaboration on literacy and lifelong learning initiatives.