



**Statement regarding Federal Government Library Consolidation and Closure
February 18, 2014**

The Canadian Library Association (CLA), the national voice for Canada's library communities, is troubled about budget cuts to Library and Archives Canada and federal government library services. There has been much public debate and discussion about these reductions and very little information forthcoming from the government. CLA wishes to participate in informed dialogue regarding government library consolidation and closure.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) is a valued partner for our professional communities and has a broad mandate to acquire, preserve, and make available the documentary heritage of Canada. It is also responsible for the management of the archival records of government. Taken together, these two areas of activity make LAC a significant contributor to the cultural and historical record of our nation.

Canadians require access to the cultural and historical records managed by Library and Archives Canada. These include books, journals, photographs, newspapers, personal and corporate archives, government records, paintings, film, and sound recordings. Canadians also expect long-term preservation and management of these information assets to ensure future generations have access to them.

Furthermore, the Canadian library and archival communities expect leadership on professional issues from their national institution, including standards for activities, such as digitization and resource description, as well as support for the provision of quality library and archival services across the country.

LAC's mandate is:

- *to preserve the documentary heritage of Canada for the benefit of present and future generations;*
- *to be a source of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada as a free and democratic society;*
- *to facilitate in Canada co-operation among communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge; and*
- *to serve as the continuing memory of the Government of Canada and its institutions.*

Further, as stated in the [Library and Archives of Canada Act](#); section 7, the objects of the Library and Archives of Canada include:

- s.7 (d) to facilitate the management of information by government institutions;
- (e) to coordinate the library services of government institutions; and
- (f) to support the development of the library and archival communities.

Within the context of these national responsibilities, the recent consolidation and closure of several Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and Health Canada libraries has raised a number of particular concerns about the process by which the departments are closing libraries and preserving - or disposing of - materials in their collections.

While LAC is a department of the Government of Canada, with mandated responsibilities to government, it must also accept responsibility, provide further leadership with regards to federal library services, and continue to be a functioning library and archive in the service of all Canadians. Above all, the preservation and access to collections and information is of crucial importance.

CLA agrees that collection management practices, such as withdrawal, are necessary in library management and that library consolidation is often an effective way to reduce costs while still maintaining service for clients; however, when implemented within the context of national public collections, such processes should be transparent and open.

CLA's values include intellectual freedom, universal access to information, and collaboration¹. In light of these values, CLA is concerned about the lack of communication and consultation in the decision-making process around the consolidation and closure of these libraries. Given the absence of such dialog, CLA is concerned that there will be a substantial reduction in access to the materials in these collections, resulting in an irrevocable loss of unique information.

The Government of Canada has consistently maintained that these closures are part of an ongoing and planned digitization program that will reduce costs. DFO has also made assurances that library closures will not come at the expense of significant reductions in the availability of holdings; however, CLA has received reports that valuable materials are being lost due to the haste of these library closures.

These reports are disconcerting, particularly as there does not appear to be a long-term plan in place to ensure the preservation and continued availability of unique materials not already digitized. Canadians deserve to know how these valuable materials will be preserved and, furthermore, how the material can be accessed in the future. The library community has rallied around these issues and has tried to contribute to solutions for these challenges. For example, post-secondary institutions, such as Carleton University, have integrated some key documents into their collections. There is much more to be done.

As noted above, the plans to digitize collections are unclear. CLA appreciates that digitization can provide enhanced access to materials for employees, researchers, and the broader public. However, digitization is a long-term, labour intensive process. Given the sheer volume of material destined for digitization, the role of library and information professionals will be critical. It is essential that government use this expertise to manage and curate this material. CLA has received no assurances from the Government of Canada that such a process is in place; on the contrary, CLA has seen official documentation indicating there is no long-term digital strategy in place in many departments, including the DFO.

The "question and answer" document released on December 19, 2013 to help clarify the DFO library closure process was a good first step toward improved communication on the government's plans; however, the government's plans for the preservation of and access to the valuable material remain unclear. CLA requests transparency in matters relating to the management of publicly owned records and collections held by Departmental libraries and LAC, including further information regarding the preservation of and access to the information that was in all closed federal libraries.

¹ Canadian Library Association. Mission, Values, & Operating Principles. Available from: http://www.cla.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Mission_Values_andamp_Operating_Principles&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=13985

Canadians across the country have expressed their concern to CLA regarding these Government of Canada library closures. They are worried that these important knowledge centres are being dismantled with very little thought being given to the future generations of Canadians who might benefit from the wealth of accumulated information built up over generations.

CLA recognizes that every sector of the library community is facing financial pressure; however, in addressing fiscal challenges, the core mandate of libraries must not be sacrificed. The current approach to federal library closures risk doing just that.

CLA remains gravely concerned about the lack of transparency and potential loss of valuable materials. It is vital that the government involve library professionals in any process relating to collection management. Librarians have specialized training in evaluating and consolidating information for preservation. Their expertise can provide important insight into this process, both streamlining approaches and ensuring that the best information is retained.

CLA is calling on the Government of Canada to provide a more thorough description of the processes taken when reviewing collections. CLA is also calling on the Government of Canada to actively engage with CLA, the archival and research communities, and other stakeholders to work on a more transparent process for the management of the valuable publicly-owned collections held by Departmental libraries and LAC.

Given CLA's long history of partnership with LAC and our broad representation, it would be pleased to facilitate this discussion.

The Canadian Library Association/Association canadienne des bibliothèques (CLA/ACB) is the national voice for Canada's library communities, representing the interests of libraries, library workers, and all those concerned about enhancing the quality of life of Canadians through information and literacy. CLA/ACB represents 1,410 library workers, libraries, and library supporters; and Canadian libraries serve in excess of 34 million Canadians through the nation's public, school, academic, government, and special libraries.

For more information, please visit www.cla.ca.