



CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION:

A Proposed New Vision for Our National Association

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 68 years, the Canadian Library Association (CLA) has acted as a national voice for libraries on a diversity of library and information-related policy issues, and has gained recognition as the representative of Canadian libraries from the federal government and international library organizations.

Despite the visibility and recognition CLA enjoys, declining membership and other factors have significantly weakened the position of CLA as the voice of a unified Canadian library community. The consequence of this weakening is not only a dilution of CLA's effectiveness as a national library presence, but a broader weakening of the influence Canadian libraries have on national and international issues.

After years of attempting to adjust CLA's focus and activities, it has become clear that a fundamental restructuring is required to ensure that CLA is the voice of a unified, coordinated Canadian library community, while still enabling the participation of a broad range of stakeholders.

This paper discusses possibilities for the future Canadian Library Association, with particular focus on the following key areas:

Suggested Mandate for Future CLA

This paper outlines the following priority areas for a national library association:

- Subject focus on national policy issues related to library services, information rights, and library values.
- Activity focus on research, professional dialogue, and national advocacy related to these policy topics and issues.

Suggested Scenarios for Structure of Future CLA

CLA Executive Council recommends the organization restructure to become a federation of provincial associations and national institutional associations and presents various governance scenarios for consideration.

Organizational Costs and Financial models

Based on the suggested mandate, this paper provides some commentary on resources that would be desirable in the initial phases, such as expertise and research funding, and suggests potential financial models based on the suggested structure, such as participation fees or member levies.

The following next steps and projected timelines are proposed to move towards the goal of creating a restructured and revitalized CLA:

- a) If there is interest in pursuing the federated association-of-associations model recommended by CLA Executive Council, then further refinement of the structure and the financial model will be required through discussion between the provincial associations and national library associations. (Proposed for February and March 2015.)
- b) Broader consultation will need to be undertaken by each library association with its member base. (Proposed for April to May 2015.)
- c) CLA Executive Council hopes to present a further refined model for a federated CLA to members for approval at the CLA AGM held in Ottawa in June 2015.

I. THE NEED

Copyright. Privacy. Net neutrality. Information equity. Cultural preservation. Intellectual freedom. Accessible formats. These are just some of the significant national policy issues that impact all of us as Canadians and the work of our libraries. Those of us who work in the library sector seek to ensure that libraries can collect, curate, preserve, and provide access to the information, knowledge, and cultural expression that forms the bedrock of Canadian culture, social development, innovation, economic development, and civic engagement. Our work celebrates and reinforces Canadian diversity, supports lifelong learning, and contributes to the development of just and equitable communities. Our libraries and the civic interests we uphold serve as the foundation for modern democracy and human advancement.

These fundamental issues and values are impacted by competing interests: national, international, commercial, and political. They are values and interests that Canadian libraries have long worked to protect, and they are increasingly vulnerable as new contexts emerge and existing contexts become more complicated – terrorism and domestic security, international commerce, digital networks, consumer convenience, big data.

Canadian libraries need a strong and coherent national presence – an organization that monitors these national contexts and issues, contemplates how they intersect with the interests and values the library community both holds and upholds, recommends policy evolution, and provides advice for developing positions on issues of concern. We need a national platform for the entire library community to discuss and address sector-wide, national issues – issues that impact our efforts to protect and champion fundamental freedoms and rights. These are not activities that can be undertaken or coordinated in an ad-hoc manner. We need to be dedicated, agile, and strategic. And we must be unified.

Equally as important, we need a strong, focused, and effective national voice that advocates on these very issues. We need a single organization that can speak with authority and confidence to the significant national and international issues and events that impact the provision of library services, Canadians' access to information, and Canadians' ability to engage with knowledge and information. We need this because the very issues that library services uphold and that are critical to an informed, engaged, and equitable society are becoming more complex, and the stakeholders with competing interests are so influential that any fragmentation of the library sector voice at a national level will mean we are not heard. We will be dismissed because we will not be seen as unified.

II. CURRENT CONTEXT

For over 68 years, the Canadian Library Association has served as this unified national voice. CLA has advocated on issues such as copyright legislation, Library Materials Rate, net neutrality, right to privacy, services to the print disabled, intellectual freedom, and more. CLA collaborates with the international library community, mainly through its involvement with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). It has provided support for research regarding the library and information sector, including statistics and reports on the value of libraries, human resources in the library and information field (8Rs), services to people with print disabilities, and the National School Library Standards Project. Despite struggles with capacity and declining membership, CLA is nonetheless still recognized as the national voice for libraries among federal government bodies and international stakeholders. CLA has the important advantage of name recognition, credibility, and profile among federal and international policy makers.

Although CLA has had successes in positioning itself with federal policy makers and the world outside of the Canadian library sector, maintaining a unique and relevant position inside our sector has been more challenging. The astounding number of associations dedicated to the library and information sector are all competing for membership and, although each association is clearly working to represent their constituents, the overall effect is a dilution of advocacy efforts in promoting library values and the value of libraries in Canada.

There are now recognized national library institutional organizations which address the specific and focused issues of their institutional members and have increasing influence at the federal level. These associations have the confidence of their institutional members and access to the institutional resources they need to get their work done. However, they are not representative of all libraries in their respective sectors.

The provincial and territorial associations are likewise effective in key areas – they offer closer-to-home, more intimate and affordable regional opportunities for cross-sector networking, learning, and engagement for individual library staff. They also offer a unified voice for their institutional and individual members to their respective provincial and territorial governments, which are significant financial stakeholders of both public and academic libraries.

Although these national and provincial associations are effective in meeting members' interests, federal advocacy becomes diffuse and less effective with many voices. When a major national policy issue arises – the Marakesh Treaty, the cancellation of the long-form census, copyright – multiple library associations all mobilize, writing letters which may have similar messages but come across as disjointed and disconnected. Policy makers and politicians receive a bundle of correspondence that is easy to dismiss because the fragmentation sends a signal that we are not aligned. These policy makers

will often reach out to CLA for a position, seeking to understand what libraries think on these issues. For how much longer will they exert even this effort? The fragmentation of national voice in our library community is dangerous and does a disservice to our overlapping memberships, our good and honourable intentions, and, ultimately, the achievement of our own interests as librarians, institutions, and associations.

The recent Royal Society Expert Panel report on *The Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives*¹ notes this very problem in depth. Fragmentation in the library community is the single biggest threat to having our voice taken seriously at a national level.

The world has changed since CLA was created. The original construct for its membership, for how it works, and what it does was based on a simpler library sector. Decades later, we see a diminished CLA – one that has struggled because it operates with/through traditional membership paradigms and in a more competitive landscape. We have all witnessed CLA grapple in recent years to re-establish its relevance within the library community and become sustainable within its traditional construct.

We cannot succeed with the existing model: we are at a crisis point and can no longer continue with the status quo.

We need a way forward that recreates the necessary unified national voice for libraries and library issues, that responds in an informed and strategic manner, that is in the best interests of our institutions and the citizens they serve, that effectively brings together the multitude of voices across our country and sector, and – importantly – that leverages our decades-long progress in establishing CLA as a national voice and brand.

Initiating the discussion ...

Over the past several decades, there have been numerous discussions about CLA's future and attempts to devise a more robust structure. The elimination of divisions and streamlining of Executive Council involved a major consultative process and a significant change to the governance of the association. However, the implementation of the new membership fees in 2012, an attempt to balance the budget, resulted in a significant increase to institutional membership rates without a corresponding increase in value. This, in turn instigated a sense of urgency for a completely re-envisioned Canadian Library Association: institutional membership began to decline even more dramatically, and it became evident that there was an immediate need to completely reorganize CLA in order to create a sustainable organization capable of undertaking strategic and effective advocacy.

¹ *The Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel Report: The Future Now. Canada's Libraries, Archives, and Public Memory.* (<http://ow.ly/FWQJ2>). See pages 52-59 for discussion about library associations.

Initial discussions about the necessity for restructuring were held informally with members and non-members in 2013 and 2014 and a session was held at the CLA Conference in 2014 to seek members' views regarding potential models and their support for fundamental and radical changes to our national association. A variety of opinions were expressed during this session. Primarily, we heard support for the subject focus presented in this concept paper and ongoing support for a national association. These expressions of support were layered with expressed interest in continuing CLA as a platform for national dialogue and for opportunities for individuals to contribute their expertise. We believe it was understood that significant structural changes were being contemplated, but that CLA should seek to meet these interests in a future model. A summary of this discussion was presented in a subsequent issue of *Feliciter*.

After the June 2014 conference, CLA Executive Council commissioned a report on potential future structures for CLA given what the Executive believes should be the unique mandate of a national library sector association:

- *Subject focus on national policy issues related to library services, information rights, and library values.*
- *Activity focus on research, professional dialogue, and national advocacy related to these policy and values topics.*

The consultant's report² explored a variety of options given the current Canadian library association landscape:

- a) *Direct membership*: current model
- b) *Chapter model*: current model with regional chapters
- c) *Federation of associations*
- d) *Coalition/Alliance of associations*

Executive Council agreed *options c) federation of associations* and *d) coalition/alliance of associations* are most compelling for a future CLA.

We know *option a)* will not work for the future: it is CLA's current structure and it is not viable. *Option b)* extends the current structure and would further intensify membership competition with other associations at a time when we are trying to build collaboration and minimize the financial burden of association membership on individuals and institutions.

Both *option c) federation of associations* and *option d) coalition/alliance of associations* allow for a single national voice, respect and strengthen the advantages of provincial association membership, and offer scaffolding for the interests of the national sector institution associations (e.g., CULC and CARL). Further, while Quebec libraries have

² *The full report is available on the CLA website.*

shared interests in issues that are addressed at the federal level, there must also be unique consideration of ASTED's position as a national association.

III. THE PROPOSAL: FUTURE CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

a) Suggested Focus for Future CLA

As noted above, the suggested priority areas for the future CLA are:

- *Subject focus on national policy issues related to library services, information rights, and library values.*
- *Activity focus on research, professional dialogue, and national advocacy related to these policy topics and issues.*

These priorities ensure that CLA does not compete with the outstanding continuing education and professional development opportunities offered by provincial associations. They are also unique to a national level body.

Diligence will be required to ensure that CLA remains focused on these areas. The proposed governance model ensures that the appropriate representatives are at the table to enable this commitment. Through clear representation, the roles and responsibilities of the national association (CLA), the national institutional associations, and the provincial associations will be differentiated.

b) Suggested Scenarios for Structure of Future CLA

Scenario 1: Federation of Provincial Associations and National Institutional Associations

Description:

This model sees a formal federated association of the provincial associations and national institutional associations. While the associations are the actual members of a federation of associations, the ability for individuals and institutions to participate in CLA activities would be inherited through their membership in the provincial or national institutional associations.

CLA could continue to have various networks and committees as a forum for issue-specific sector dialogue, but they would focus on addressing national policy issues and value of libraries, as per CLA's subject focus.

Governance:

The actual legal membership and governing board of this association would be comprised of both the Executive Director and President/Chair of each member

association. Alternatively, membership of CLA could be comprised of this representative group and a Board elected from these assigned representatives.

Benefits/Drawbacks:

Benefits:

- Can speak on a national level with a unified voice.
- More structured so objectives are more likely to be accomplished.
- Stable membership increases credibility and reputation.
- Formalized processes and agreements reinforce commitments and clarify expectations.
- Can use the name Canadian Library Association.
- Ensures transparency and accountability for the membership because of the formal legal and reporting requirements.

Drawbacks:

- Must conform to association legal and reporting requirements.
- If all representatives are on the Board, such a large board could make it difficult to reach consensus and facilitate meetings. With a Board of that size, it is common to have an executive committee; this approach would be a simple solution to addressing this drawback.

Scenario 2: Coalition/Alliance of Provincial Associations and National Institutional Associations

Description:

This is a loose affiliation model in which the provincial associations and national institutional associations come together less formally on issues of interest to the partners; however, partners can opt-in and out at will. There is no legal structure to such an alliance and no obligations for members.

A coalition/alliance would likely not have the same formally created networks, and there would be no formal accountability amongst members or leadership.

Governance:

A coalition/alliance would have a Steering Committee rather than a legally constituted Board. The Steering Committee would have no formal obligations to the alliance, but could provide some leadership and effort facilitation.

Recommended membership remains the Executive Director and the President/Chair of the member associations.

Benefits/Drawbacks:

Benefits:

- Looser structure allows for flexibility of commitment from associations.
- Does not need to register and meet organizational requirements as a formal association.
- More flexibility in terms of process and decision-making.
- The participants for each activity would have to be created afresh with a group of the willing.

Drawbacks:

- Less firm and predictable commitment from associations.
- Must recreate the framework for each new initiative.
- Structure provides less incentive to come to a consensus.
- Coalition/alliance still suggests fractured voices.
- Cannot use name Canadian Library Association
 - This is a strong and recognized name, discarding it would be a loss in reputation and confusing.
 - There is a risk another would form and take the name of CLA.
 - Could call it Canadian Library Association: An Alliance of Canadian Library Associations – but that becomes cumbersome and confusing, and might require repeated explanation that would detract from other efforts.
- Less transparency and accountability for membership.

Recommended Scenario: Scenario 1 – Federation of Provincial Associations and National Institutional Associations

The current CLA Executive Council recommends *Scenario 1: Federation of Provincial Associations and National Institutional Associations* as the future structure of CLA. The benefits of this model far outweigh the benefits of a loose alliance and its drawbacks are easily mitigated through the creation of a lean governance structure.

As well, this model allows for the interests initially expressed by members at the 2014 CLA Conference. It provides: opportunities for individuals to contribute through their provincial or sector association membership, an ongoing platform for national dialogue, and a unified national voice.

c) Potential Governance Scenarios

As noted above, it is suggested that membership of the new CLA be formed by bringing together the Executive Directors and Presidents/Chairs of the member associations. This

is a large group, so some thought would need to be given to the creation of the Board and other governance structures and tools.

Voting and weighting of influence in this context will be the most challenging discussion. This model presents the same problem as Canadian Confederation: how to account for the diversity represented by the various members. Given the partners at the table, it is very complicated. For example:

- Looking at it regionally: OLA represents over 5,000 members, BCLA represents over 700 members, and APLA represents 330 members, just to mention a few provincial and territorial associations.
- Looking at national affiliations: CARL has significantly impacted national policy and represents academic organizations with considerable economic and political influence. Likewise, CULC represents the interests of public libraries that serve 50% of the Canadian population and has increasing national policy influence, but does not represent smaller public libraries, which often face different issues.
- Looking at Canada's unique governance landscape: ASTED is a national association for Quebec. What does this mean within the context of a federated association-of-association CLA?

These are just some of the considerations; there are most certainly more that will arise through discussion.

There is no perfect solution that layers all of the unique characteristics of the various parties. Given this, there are a few suggested scenarios that rely on the good will of all members:

Scenario A: Everyone holds the same influence

Each association at the table carries the same weight in voting. With both the President/Chair and the Executive Director (when there is one), the decision would need to be made who carries the association's vote. This could be decided through the new CLA's by-laws or left to each association to determine.

Scenario B: Weighted voting

Two or three tiers of voting could be established based on the size of the memberships: e.g., three votes, two votes, or one vote. There are different ways to allocate votes in a model such as this. Clearly, there would need to be significant discussion about this approach.

Within such a weighted voting structure, the governance model may need to consider an approach to overlapping memberships across provincial and national institutional associations.

Of course, other nuances can also be considered. The suggestions in this paper are intended to start a discussion of what governance of a future federated national association of associations could look like. Actual decision-making processes would need to be developed by the future Board.

Option for a governance trial period

Because governance will likely be the most difficult piece of the federation puzzle, the new Board could also agree to try an approach and then revisit the decision-making/voting structure after the first two years of operation to determine what members think and to discuss any challenges that have arisen.

d) Organizational Costs

If CLA is transformed and its mandate more specific and focused as described above, the financial requirements will change. Currently CLA is a \$1.118M operation. Some of those costs support aspects of the organization that are unlikely to exist in a transformed organization.

A clear financial model is critical and will encourage sustainability, transparency, and fairness. It will also facilitate predictability for CLA and its partners. However, as we contemplate an appropriate model, it is reasonable to ask: how much will it cost to operate the future CLA?

The truthful answer is, we don't know. The costs will arise from the scope of the new CLA and how the future leadership and membership choose to shape it. However, as noted in the sections above, we have some initial thoughts for resources that will be necessary to accomplish the proposed scope of work and, as a result, see the initial financial need as significantly less than the current CLA operating budget.

Other sections of this report document requirements that are likely core costs in operating CLA and that take into account the imperative of a financially leaner CLA than the current model, suggesting an initial annual operating budget in the area of \$300,000-350,000. Whatever structure, focus, and funding model emerge, it is critical that the transformed CLA be a nimble, flexible organization taking full advantage of cost-effective co-location spaces, contemporary technologies, and access to expertise.

e) Suggested Initial Resources

It is recommended that the initial resource level assigned for the new CLA be lean. The following suggestions could serve as a starting point for discussion by the new Board:

Staffing Resources

Several skills sets and expertise are needed to achieve this vision – they may or may not be unique positions, contracted support, or blended positions:

- *Executive direction* – organizational, leadership, and strong strategy and communications skills.
- *Research coordination* – strong research administration background.
- *Policy coordination* – strong understanding of policy development.
- *Communications skills* – advocacy, marketing, strategic communications, and government relations expertise.

Other Resources

- Administrative work of the association could be handled through contracted support: e.g., book-keeping, IT support.
- CLA could create a modest fund to ensure that research can be a dedicated undertaking or to offset some costs of research by members.
- Various operational expenses such as mobile phones and computers would be required. Staff could work from their homes and seek meeting space at member libraries when required.

Because this is a small organization, the salaries of any staff positions should be appropriately scaled.

The initial costs of the new CLA should be significantly lower than the current costs and could be as low as \$300,000 to \$350,000 per year. The future Board could then determine how it wishes to shape and/or grow the organization as it further evolves.

f) Potential Financial Models

A transparent, sustainable funding model is central to the success of whatever form the renewed CLA takes. While the initiatives of the association may expand and contract given the priorities of its governance body, the core organizational capacity must be supported.

At a time when all associations are experiencing financial pressures, taking on new obligations is difficult. However, a national voice for libraries cannot be sustained solely by volunteers and by doing the essential work “off the sides of our desks.” It requires focus, continuity, and the right skill sets to undertake the work; it requires a commitment to provide the funds necessary.

The financial model should match the association structure and its governance model. As discussions proceed to refine the nature of the renewed CLA, these elements must align. However, for the purposes of discussion, a number of models are provided to suggest alternative strategies.

Scenario 1: Annual Participation Fee

Scenario 1A

All member associations will contribute an annual participation fee to support the organization. A fee structure will be determined that recognizes association size and financial capacity. Tiered fees will be used to facilitate year over year predictability. Such tiered fees must not unfairly penalize either large or small associations. Member associations could make a long term commitment through constitutional changes or signing an MOU with CLA.

Special projects or initiatives (i.e., those beyond the core priorities as determined by the member associations) are funded through extra contributions by those associations and organizations interested in participating. It is anticipated that associations or organizations beyond the member associations (e.g. non-library associations) may wish to join these projects and initiatives. A separate business plan and funding model will be developed for each project or initiative.

Scenario 1B

A variation on Option #1 is to have only the provincial and territorial library associations as “core” members (and therefore funding the basic support of CLA). Other associations (or non-library groups) would participate only on special projects that relate to their interests. As before, these special projects or initiatives would be separately funded (i.e., beyond the core funding).

Scenario 2: Membership Levy and Annual Participation Fee

An additional annual fee will be charged to each member of the provincial and territorial library associations as part of their individual membership fees. This would be a mandatory fee enabled through constitutional or bylaw changes by the associations.

Other associations (i.e., those with institutional members rather than personal members) will pay an annual participation fee. A fee structure will be determined that recognizes association size and financial capacity. Tiered fees will be used to facilitate year over year predictability. Such tiered fees must not unfairly penalize either large or small associations.

In this model the “members” of CLA are individuals who belong to the library associations and the associations whose members are institutions (i.e., libraries).

Others Scenarios?

To be explored through discussions.

IV. BENEFITS OF PROPOSED MODEL FOR STAKEHOLDER ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERS

This proposal seeks to broadly outline the benefits of a strong unified national voice for Canadian libraries and library values and interests. The recommended model of a federated association-of-associations CLA also offers a number of significant benefits to provincial and national institutional associations:

- Associations will benefit in that, as members of the leadership of a federated CLA, they will have increased influence on the priorities and strategies of the national association;
- The suggested research component of the proposed future CLA helps the associations support their members’ in being knowledgeable in areas of library interests and could inform advocacy and policy development work at all levels in the library community;
- CLA supports these associations in their own advocacy and enables their membership to have a voice on the national stage;
- The suggested focus and participation in a federated CLA frees up the associations to focus on the work they have identified as important to their direct members;
- Provides an opportunity for strong representation in a partnership table that builds sector strength at a national level.
- Provides national engagement opportunities for members.

For individual members of these associations, their personal or institutional membership in their provincial association or national institutional association provides them with opportunities to participate in national dialogue without having to pay a full membership fee, as is currently required by CLA’s direct membership model.

V. WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOTHING?

As we presented at the 2014 conference, CLA is gradually weakening.

Institutional membership has declined considerably and continues to decline. CLA is struggling to maintain its operations within the existing budget. It must change

significantly if it is to effectively advocate and represent the library community nationally.

Indeed, there is not a “do nothing” alternative to consider in this case. There is no option to continue without significant changes. We must either fundamentally revise our model or we will soon need to completely shut down. CLA’s continuity and credibility with federal stakeholders and the decades of reputation building with the federal government will have been lost. We cannot let this happen.

VI. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

a) Refinement of structures and financial model

The structural and financial ideas expressed in this concept paper are intended to test the water with the major library association players in Canada. If there is interest in this approach to a renewed CLA with one of the proposed membership approaches, then the existing CLA Executive Council suggests that representatives from each of the provincial/territorial associations and national institutional associations come together in a working group to co-create the actual governance structure and financial model for a new CLA.

We would suggest the timeline for this work is February and March of 2015.

b) Broader consultation

Even if we as association representatives are able to achieve consensus about the desired future of a federated CLA, there will still be a need for each association, including CLA, to consult with its own members and work through its own decision-making processes. This consultation and potential ratification process is important, and it should be conducted expeditiously to maintain momentum and focus.

We would suggest this consultation period is April to May 2015. Consultation plans and timelines for such consultation require further discussion amongst stakeholders if the decision is to pursue the approach suggested in this proposal.

c) Decision-making and approvals

The CLA AGM will be held in early June 2015 at the Ottawa conference. This will be the first gathering of the membership since the 2014 conference, during which the idea of a transformed CLA was initially posed to members present. CLA Executive Council would like to present a future vision for CLA to the membership at this 2015 conference.

This is an ambitious timeline. It is important to note that CLA needs to evolve soon if it is to continue supporting the library community as an effective national voice.

VI. FINAL REMARKS

For the past 68 years, the Canadian Library Association has served as a unified voice for libraries and library workers across the country. During this period, the library association landscape has grown exponentially, as have the complexities of the information rights we uphold, the policies we endorse, and the services we provide.

A strong unified national voice to advocate on information rights, information policy, and library values is more important than ever before. This proposal for a newly structured, federated association-of-associations model is a significant departure from CLA's traditional direct membership structure. However, as a structure it offers many strengths:

- reduces duplication of efforts across the library associations;
- strengthens the membership benefits of provincial association membership;
- offers scaffolding for the interests of the national institutional associations;
- creates a structure for true collaboration based on the regional and national institutional associations; and is
- financially viable and sustainable;

all while preserving the interests originally expressed by CLA membership for a strong national platform for policy dialogue and the ability for individuals to participate and network with regards to these issues. And these objectives are all accomplished while maintaining the national brand of CLA, building on its foundation of more than 65 years as a federally and internationally recognized national association.

This proposal does represent some level of risk for all suggested stakeholders. But CLA Executive Council would suggest that the risk associated with allowing CLA to disappear is even greater. We are all committed to a strong presence for libraries at national and international levels. We all have strengths we can contribute. We are all good at collaboration. A healthy, vibrant, and effective national association is entirely within our grasp if we work together to create it.