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# Initiative for Equitable Library Access

## *Kick-Off Meeting Report*

Friday October 26, 2007  
Ottawa, Ontario

### **I. Context and Purpose of this Meeting**

On October 2, 2007, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) announced the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA), a \$3 million, three year initiative, designed to improve access to information and to develop a strategy that will support equitable library service for Canadians with print disabilities. The right to information is the cornerstone of this initiative. To launch this initiative, LAC invited stakeholders including individuals with print disabilities, consumer organizations of persons with disabilities and representatives of the library, print publishing and multiple format publishing communities for a “kick-off” consultation. The objectives of this first consultation were articulated as follows:

- To develop a shared understanding of the Initiative for Equitable Library Access and of equitable library service.
- To consult stakeholders on how to best to coordinate the collaborative effort to get there and the next steps to deliver on this common understanding.

### **II. Agenda**

#### **1. Opening and introductions**

#### **2. Overview of the Initiative**

#### **3. Developing a common vision of equitable library access**

*(Small group work followed by interactive plenary session to identify what an equitable library service could be and what it would look like if it were successfully achieved.)*

#### **4. How do we get there? Making the collaborative process successful**

*(Small group work followed by interactive plenary discussion on how to engage/consult partners in a meaningful way on the three key activities of IELA, i.e., the development of standards, the electronic clearinghouse and the Internet portal.)*

#### **5. Closing Remarks**

#### **6. Adjournment**

### **III. In Attendance**

Eleven representatives from stakeholder groups attended this meeting; see Annex A for the complete list of participants and invitees. Unfortunately, several invited stakeholders did not respond or were unable to attend for reasons beyond their control.

### **IV. About this Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide a set of notes on the outputs of this meeting. It is not intended to be an analysis of the meeting, but rather an *aide-mémoire* to assist those tasked with moving this Initiative forward. Every effort has been made to stay as close as possible to the participants' own words. A draft of this report was circulated to participants to ensure accuracy.

### **V. Key Messages**

#### **1. Opening**

##### **Sean Berrigan, Director General of the Strategic Office, LAC**

Mr. Berrigan welcomed participants and thanked them for attending. He reminded them that IELA, had been announced by the Honourable Josée Verner on October 2 and indicated that within LAC, the initiative will be part of the Strategic Office. He explained that Treasury Board ministers asked

LAC to develop and cost a strategy for implementing nation-wide partnerships, activities and services to meet the long-term library and information access needs of Canadians with print disabilities. He assured attendees that the IELA office is committed to working closely with all stakeholders so this strategy can become a reality.

## **2. Overview of the Initiative**

### **Mary Frances Laughton, Manager, IELA**

Ms. Laughton provided an overview of IELA. She indicated that the official mandate of IELA is “to create the conditions for sustainable and equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities” and that the initiative has been given \$1M a year for the next three years. The key deliverables at the end of the three years will be a go-forward strategy, an internet portal, library service standards and training, and an electronic clearinghouse for multiple format production. Ms. Laughton explained that IELA is not a production initiative and that no IELA funds have been allocated for the purpose of producing materials; however, the work to be done over the next three years should set the stage to create an environment for multiple format production.

To develop the go-forward strategy, Ms. Laughton said IELA will be informed by reports such as “Fulfilling the Promise” and “Opening the Book” as well as by consultations and specific studies to be undertaken. The intent is that at the end of the three year commitment to IELA, LAC will be able to define what the real cost of equitable public library access is in Canada. This will include the costs of producing materials for public libraries and for managing and delivering those materials through public libraries. This should put LAC and stakeholders in a position to request the funds on a permanent basis from the various levels of government.

Ms. Laughton pointed out that one of the early IELA activities will be the development of an Internet Portal which will be developed to the latest accessible web standards through discussions with the various communities who will be using it. The current thinking is that by going to

this portal, people will be able to find the results of meetings such as today's gathering, results of studies, links to information on access technologies, library service standards, training information and materials in multiple formats in Canadian libraries.

In consultation with the library community, LAC will develop library service standards, tools and training materials to move towards equitable library access; it will assist with training sessions and technology demonstrations. It will also develop costing templates for the issues involved in delivering equitable library services. In addition, IELA will continue the work already underway on the development of an Electronic Clearinghouse for multiple format production and will be addressing the various copyright issues, both national and international, that impede true access.

Ms. Laughton emphasized that the purpose of today's meeting was to look at the big picture and discuss high level strategic considerations; issues such as copyright, personal access and others will be the subject of future consultation meetings and discussions.

In closing, Ms. Laughton shared her regret that a number of invited stakeholders were unable to send a representative to this meeting or had to decline at the last minute for reasons beyond their control.

### **Questions of clarification/Comments:**

- Q. Regarding the portal, you have a website that lists what this initiative is about, why have you chosen to develop a new portal rather than using that website?

A. The rationale is that in order to get to the information, we need to use a number of keys; we would like the website to be a high level portal that would give easier and quicker access to different types of resources for different types of users be they libraries, consumers, producers etc.

- Q. Is there a role for IELA to make LAC's current catalogue more user-friendly?

A. Yes, we want to set up an internal LAC steering committee to make sure its catalogues are more accessible and as main stream as possible.

- Q. Is IELA primarily focusing on access issues relative to the public library system which is a municipal responsibility, or on the availability of print materials and the print delivery system, in general? Also, is it possible to explore issues that exist in the academic library system?

A. The primary and fundamental underpinning of this initiative is public library access and therefore, its focus will be on public library materials. However, in doing so, IELA will have to address issues concerning the print delivery system and academic libraries. Academic libraries will greatly benefit from the clearinghouse and resource sharing through AMICUS. Academic libraries can also contribute some expertise to assist the public library system.

- Q. What multiple formats are we talking about?

A. We have heard that the print disabled community wants the same access to their public library as everyone else; we are looking at creating an environment where that can happen. In terms of what multiple formats we are considering, we will consider those you tell us to consider; braille, plain text, HTML, BRF, digital audio, large print,...; we want everyone to have similar access across the country.

### 3. Developing a common vision of equitable library access

In a visioning-type of exercise, participants first shared their ideas (as well as their hopes) in small groups about what equitable library service could be and what it would look like if it were successful. These ideas were then shared in plenary. The following represents the key messages emerging from this session.

- Equitable library service means having **choice**: libraries offer all materials in all formats, e.g., braille, plain text, HTML, large print, audio, especially more high quality commercially produced audio books.
- That everything is mainstream, NOT “special”; one system that provides choice to everyone.
- The principle of universal design is in place; this means that whoever needs or wants to have material regardless of their situation in life has access to the library (e.g., a young mom at home listening to an audio book while doing housework, a commuter listening in the car, a person with a disability, a young person doing research, etc.).
- Equitable library service would mean one interoperable and seamless delivery system which users could customize to deliver their format of choice.;
- Equitable library access means one system that provides the same quality for all, i.e., the same turnaround time and assistance, regardless of format used; libraries have knowledgeable and qualified staff to assist users with print disabilities and to show them how the technology is adapted.
- Equitable library access means inter-library services are available for all.
- Libraries perform outreach activities in communities; public libraries deliver to seniors’ residences.

- Issues of intellectual property rights have been addressed and do not impede the production of material in multiple formats.
- In a perfect world, there is no need for a CNIB library because the system of public libraries provides services to Canadians with print disabilities; publicly funded not private charity.

Achieving that vision would require:

- That sufficient funding (through federal, provincial, territorial and municipal partnerships) is available for a system that public and educational libraries could tap into.
- That files originate from a central, neutral place, perhaps a new public agency of some sort.
- That an equitable publishing environment exists where publishers make the information accessible in electronic format and contract out the production into alternative formats.
- That a set of standards and guides are developed and implemented.
- That libraries have the training and technology to assist and teach end users to read books in multiple formats; and/or that users themselves are equipped with the technology.
- That there is a phone number/hotline of an accessibility expert for library staff to call when they need help providing equitable services; this would help those in small to medium size libraries who do not have the resources for in-house expertise.
- That a communication and outreach strategy is in place to ensure users are informed of the services and want to use them.



- That a change of mindset takes place both in libraries and in the print disabled communities; that potential users will see their local library as a place to go for materials.

#### **4. How do we get there?** (Making the collaborative process successful)

Participants were asked for their ideas and suggestions on how LAC, which has been asked to coordinate key activities to develop and cost the implementation of a nation-wide strategy, could engage/consult partners in a meaningful way on the following three activities that will be central to IELA: Library Service Standards and Training, Electronic Clearinghouse, and an Internet Portal.

The following represents the key messages emerging from this discussion:

##### **A. Library Service Standards and Training**

The kinds of standards that need to be developed include:

- Service standards
- Marketing standards
- Outreach standards
- Procurement standards
- Technological standards

##### **B. Internet Portal**

Attendees indicated a big challenge on how to consult people on what a portal should look like, what features it should have and how it can be used. To address this challenge, they identified the need for face-to-face consultations and underscored the importance of following-up after the consultations to inform people of the decisions made and “check if we got it right”. They suggested that a test portal be designed and tested with stakeholders as part of the consultation process to see how it works and what needs to be improved. They also recommended that we consult with

accessibility, end-user experts in its development. In addition they stressed the need for links to be kept up-to-date and organized by categories.

Some participants felt strongly that the portal needs to be positioned clearly as a national initiative, i.e., a government portal associated with libraries and that it provide something that Google isn't already doing.

### **C. Electronic Clearinghouse**

With regard to the Electronic Clearinghouse, participants indicated the following:

- The success of a clearinghouse will be directly proportional to the level of trust between the publisher and the producers of the information – trust that copyright will be respected and data will be protected and secure.
- It would be important to look at existing models that are being used and to assess how effective or not they have been and why.
- There is a need to legislate or otherwise mandate that after a specific date, no publication will be purchased by governments and public libraries unless a master copy is sent to the Clearinghouse; another way to do this is to say the public libraries will not buy a book unless it has an electronic format.

In closing, some participants emphasized that standards alone will not be sufficient and that legislation will be required for implementation. The Charter of Rights guarantees that those with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else and that includes access to written materials by those with print disabilities.

### **Consultations: Who and How?**

Participants indicated that the groups that need to be consulted include:

- Front line library staff who are meeting the consumers
- Directors of library schools who develop curriculum
- Consumers through a broad spectrum of consumer organizations

- Producers of multiple formats
- Business through organizations such as the Canadian Federation of Business, Canadian publishers, multiple format industry associations
- Government agencies which have dealings with the publishing industry e.g., Canada Revenue Agency, Public Works and Government Services, the small business branch in Industry Canada
- The Canadian Library Association and various provincial library associations
- Various assistive technology entities
- Performers who record audio books
- Authors
- Other organizations that set standards, , e.g., Canadian Braille Authority

In addition to the suggested stakeholder groups, participants offered the following advice with regard to who should be consulted:

- Include aboriginal communities
- Consider the demographics and include different age-groups, especially the baby-boomer generation which will soon be the biggest user of multiple formats
- Consider holding regional consultations
- Participants stressed the need for a forum to bring together (1) the library community (2) the clients who are print disabled and (3) the producer/publisher community.

With regard to how to reach these groups, participants suggested attending the regular meetings of different organizations, attending library conferences across the country, and possibly using surveys. They indicated the importance of using an inclusive process to develop an acceptable certification process and suggested tying this certification to the national library symbol.

## Principles for Consultation

Attendees identified a number of principles or guidelines for consultation and indicated these apply to all three activities:

- Provide good background information well ahead of time to situate those consulted and give them time to prepare.
- When using focus groups, ensure these are extremely well facilitated to ensure that groups stay focused and the process does not derail into “complaining” sessions.
- With regard to electronic consultations, these can be used in some situations but have their limits; survey-type e-consultations can be very frustrating for those who participate; to be meaningful, e-consultations must provide an opportunity for people to make comments and explain their reasoning. Also, remember that not everybody has access to internet, so e-consultations cannot replace in-person or telephone consultations.
- Meetings such as this one can go a long way, especially when the questions are clear and people have a chance to prepare in advance.
- To make consultations meaningful, the context has to be acknowledged, in particular the fact that there may be a long wait for implementation to start. Stakeholders do not have an appetite for endless consultations without action, so it will be important to limit the timelines for consultations.
- Follow through with participants about results; keep communities informed about progress.

## VI. Closing remarks - Mary Frances Laughton

In her closing remarks, Ms. Laughton indicated that LAC wants to move forward as fast as possible and is open to different ways of involving stakeholders. She emphasized the need for LAC to understand from the stakeholders -- be they librarians, producers or users -- *how much* involvement they want in this process and *the nature* of this involvement. She invited all stakeholders to reflect on this question and get back to her.

A quick evaluation of the meeting revealed the following:

### What went well:

- Facilitation
- Clear questions
- Formulation of the invitation
- Well thought-out exercises
- Food

### Things to think about for next time:

- More forewarning about the date
- Provide background information in advance
- Make arrangements for participants who are federal employees to attend IELEA meetings without having to take annual leave
- More time for the meeting

Ms. Laughton thanked everyone for their time, their input and their frankness. She indicated that the notes on this meeting would be shared with all those who attended.

*Report prepared by Lise Pigeon & Associates*

## **Annex A**

### **Participants**

**Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC)**

Robin East

**Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education (CADSPPE)**

Mary Anne Epp

**Canadian Association of Educational Resource Centres for Alternate Formats (CAER)**

Donna Pletz-Passey

**Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB)**

Mike Potvin

**College and Institute Library Services, BC (CILS)**

Mary Anne Epp

**Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)**

John Rae

**Canadian Library Association (CLA)**

Debra Mann

**CNIB**

Catherine Moore

**Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)**

Claudette Larocque

**Multiple Format Industry Association (MFIA)**

Sharlyn Ayotte

**National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)**

Tim McIsaac

**Provincial Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC)**

Trevor Surgenor

## **Regrets**

**Association pour l'avancement des sciences et des techniques de la documentation (ASTED)**

Hélène Larouche

**Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ)**

**Canadian Publishers' Council (CPC)**

Jacqueline Hushion

**Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC)**

**Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians**

Paul Whitney

## **No Response**

**Le Regroupement des aveugles et amplyopes du Québec (RAAQ)**

**Learning Disabilities Association of Québec (LDAQ)**

**Quebec Foundation for the Blind**

## **Hosts**

**Library and Archives Canada,  
Initiative for Equitable Library Access**

Sean Berrigan

Michelle Landriault

Mary Frances Laughton

Trisha Lucy

Ralph Manning

## **Facilitator**

**Lise Pigeon & Associates**

Lise Pigeon

Alice Régnier, Notetaker