

Ex Libris Association recommendations for improvements at Library and Archives Canada, June 2013

In February 2013, the Ex Libris Association issued a **Statement** regarding our views on the general decline in services at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) along with several points to improve the situation. At the same time, our extensive, ongoing timeline **Backgrounder** covering the years after 2004 that detailed LAC's fluctuating efforts to become a new kind of knowledge (or memory) institution. Obviously, LAC is struggling to chart a new course—part library, archives, and portrait gallery.

Although LAC purports to be a new-style institution engaging in a modernization process with a new digital model driving service and collections, over the past three years many groups of librarians and archivists, have raised concerns about the direction, lack of consultation, and timing of LAC's service delivery implementations as well as LAC's seeming distancing itself from important provisions in the *Library and Archives of Canada Act*.

The Ex Libris February Statement ended with a call for a thorough review of LAC by Parliament due to fluctuating policies; inconsistent planning; inability to maintain traditional services and collections; declining use of public building space and direct contact with clientele; and poor communication and liaison with associated groups and institutions. ELA is opposed to legislative amendments that would legitimize existing reduced service levels or significantly reverse LAC's current legislative objectives.

Now, with a change in leadership at Library and Archives Canada, Ex Libris believes there is a significant opportunity for this national institution to find its way forward through a significant rebuilding exercise that goes beyond searching for a new leader.

What follows are some key provisions of the *Library and Archives of Canada Act, 2004* with an Ex Libris assessment of the current status of these provisions and some recommendations to get LAC back on track. The Preamble (below) sets out some admirable ambitions for an institution that merged and built upon Canada's National Library and its National Archives. Many would say that these ambitions have largely been set aside. The assessments and recommendations reflect concerns primarily from a library viewpoint (e.g., the provision for an advisory group or support for federal libraries) but also include many issues raised by archival, historical, genealogical, national, and provincial groups that frequently use LAC's resources.

PREAMBLE

- (A) THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE OF CANADA BE PRESERVED FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS;
- (B) CANADA BE SERVED BY AN INSTITUTION THAT IS A SOURCE OF ENDURING KNOWLEDGE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL, CONTRIBUTING TO THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF CANADA AS A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY;
- (C) THAT INSTITUTION FACILITATE IN CANADA COOPERATION AMONG THE COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN THE ACQUISITION, PRESERVATION AND DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE; AND
- (D) THAT INSTITUTION SERVE AS THE CONTINUING MEMORY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND ITS INSTITUTIONS;

NOW, THEREFORE, HER MAJESTY, BY AND WITH THE ADVICE AND CONSENT OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF COMMONS OF CANADA, ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADVISORY COUNCIL

6. THE MINISTER MAY ESTABLISH AN ADVISORY COUNCIL TO ADVISE THE LIBRARIAN AND ARCHIVIST WITH REGARD TO MAKING THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE KNOWN TO CANADIANS AND TO ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN CANADA AND FACILITATING ACCESS TO IT.

Assessment: Library and Archives Canada has used a variety of methods to seek advice including a Services Advisory Group and a Stakeholders Forum which have proven to be ineffective and divisive in the face of major changes in services and collections. The problems and challenges that LAC faces are vast and need the concerted efforts of library and archival professionals to resolve. At the same time Canadian libraries have faced what has been called a 'cone of silence' with respect to LAC meaning it is extremely difficult to know the status of programs or decisions that have been taken that affect participants in the Canadian library network. Decision makers at LAC appear to have been unaware of the interdependent nature of the Canadian library and archival systems and the critical role that LAC has played in their development.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris feels that there is a need for an ongoing Advisory Council to be established to bring sustained expert opinion into the LAC as well as to serve as a communication vehicle out to all Canadian organizations.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should eliminate restrictions in the recently adopted Code of Conduct to allow employees to participate in international, national, and provincial meetings to impart their knowledge about current projects and research.*

OBJECTS AND POWERS

OBJECTS

7. THE OBJECTS OF THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF CANADA ARE

(A) TO ACQUIRE AND PRESERVE THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE;

Assessment: Parliamentarians assumed that a national institution, Library and Archives Canada, would be collecting comprehensively in terms of published materials and materials of national significance in the archival realm. LAC, however, has attempted to move from its traditional collecting roles as a national library and a national archives with clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities to being very selective as to what is acquired and thus what can be preserved on a current basis. The objective of building a comprehensive national collection of all Canadian publications and government and private records for preservation, research, and loan purposes seems to have been compromised. At the same time, LAC has attempted to embrace the digital revolution that is occurring and has placed much less emphasis on its analogue collecting in traditional media such as paper, microform and DVD and related preservation activities. Furthermore, there seems to be an intention to give away parts of this national collection with no assurance that these materials will be remain accessible to the Canadian public or maintained in appropriate facilities.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should actively enforce legal deposit for all formats of publishing including electronic.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should re-establish programs for the purchase, gift, and exchange of published materials.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should be the national central repository for Canada's documentary heritage and therefore that devolution of collections should stop.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC must restore its budget for acquisitions of books, manuscripts, private archives, and any other materials to be a comprehensive national resource.*

(B) TO MAKE THAT HERITAGE KNOWN TO CANADIANS AND TO ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN CANADA AND TO FACILITATE ACCESS TO IT;

Assessment: LAC has significantly weakened its role in national and international bibliographic control whereby national bodies assume responsibility for describing national collections in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Its national bibliographic database of publicly funded collections across the country is not being kept up to date, nor has LAC to date been able to move this national resource into the digital age. It has abdicated its role with respect to public programming and celebrating the contents of its collections. They appear to have given up on the exploitation of their collections and their roles as a cultural institution, especially for on-site assistance at 395 Wellington. LAC itself does not appear to have up to date technology in place to deal with the complexities of modern digital information.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris believes that the leadership role of LAC needs to be re-established in terms of the development and maintenance of national and international bibliographic standards including support for groups such as the Canadian Committee on Cataloguing.*
- *Ex Libris believes that timely, complete bibliographic and archival descriptions of LAC's Canadian holdings in all formats (based on international and national standards) need to be provided for the use of other libraries, archives, and institutions.*
- *Ex Libris believes that a national union catalogue with contributions from LAC and other Canadian libraries needs to be strengthened.*
- *Ex Libris believes that a full-scale interlibrary loan service should be provided by LAC to make documentary heritage materials available to Canadians wherever they are located.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should seek to establish itself as a visible national cultural institution by showcasing items from its collections and re-establishing a publishing program. This could take the form of digital exhibits, travelling exhibits, Portrait Gallery, on-site exhibits, publications, readings, and performances.*
- *Ex Libris believes that the 395 Wellington building, built as the Public Archives and National Library for Canada's centennial in 1967, should be re-established as a national centre of public pride to accommodate the public and researchers. The upcoming sesquicentennial in 2017 offers a perfect opportunity to refurbish and reassert its value as a public space and place.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should redouble its efforts to digitize its collections and to develop and participate in a national coordinated program for the digitization of freely available Canadian published heritage in archives, libraries, and related agencies.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should enhance its web and social media presence.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should modernize its technology to support access to its collections and those of other institutions through a trusted digital repository and an up-to-date library system.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should restore many of its specialist librarians and archivists and reinstate access to these important positions which were dismantled by ill-advised management restructuring.*

(C) TO BE THE PERMANENT REPOSITORY OF PUBLICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA AND OF GOVERNMENT AND MINISTERIAL RECORDS THAT ARE OF HISTORICAL OR ARCHIVAL VALUE;

(D) TO FACILITATE THE MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION BY GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS;

Assessment: The Government of Canada is increasingly making its published information resources available in digital form without a coherent program for the long-term access and preservation of the information content. Currently, efforts are underway to bring all federal agencies into compliance with basic principles by 2015 for record keeping purposes and LAC is offering guidelines to assist with this process.

Government records are limitless in terms of the challenges and resources they require. LAC has placed a great deal of emphasis on federal records to the detriment of other responsibilities. There is a perception that management of federal government records is the only priority of LAC at the present time and that as a result, important programs and activities have been compromised.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris believes that a new institution, or a sub-institution, should be established by the Government of Canada to deal with government records. This would allow more time for LAC's specialized sections to concentrate on issues associated with library related analogue and digital publications and with private, non-government archival resources acquired by LAC.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should be acquiring Government of Canada websites and electronic publications on a regular and comprehensive basis and providing access to these materials.*

(E) TO COORDINATE THE LIBRARY SERVICES OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS;

Assessment: The Council of Federal Libraries has been abolished and there seems to be little appetite on the part of LAC to coordinate federal libraries. There has been a tremendous reduction in the number of libraries and the resources of surviving federal libraries. There is a need for coordination and leadership on the part of LAC to maximize government support to meet the needs of government for timely and accurate information.

Recommendation:

- *Ex Libris believes that a mechanism needs to be developed by LAC to provide meaningful support to federal libraries beyond the current Secretariat functions.*

(F) TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVAL COMMUNITIES.

Assessment: Leadership takes many forms including coordination, participation, direction, financial and in-kind support, advocacy, information sharing. There is a vacuum in national leadership in the Canadian library community at the present time. There are expectations that LAC will be a leader in the archival and library communities by actively participating in national and international activities and by contributing to associations and groups nationally and internationally.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should play an active leadership role in the library communities in order to provide a national perspective.*
- *Ex Libris believes a Development Program for Canadian archives should be re-established and that a similar program should be put in place for Canadian libraries actively engaged in the*

preservation of our country's history.

POWERS OF LIBRARIAN AND ARCHIVIST

8. (1) THE LIBRARIAN AND ARCHIVIST MAY DO ANYTHING THAT IS CONDUCTIVE TO THE ATTAINMENT OF THE OBJECTS OF THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF CANADA, INCLUDING

(A) ACQUIRE PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS OR OBTAIN THE CARE, CUSTODY OR CONTROL OF THEM;

(B) TAKE MEASURES TO CATALOGUE, CLASSIFY, IDENTIFY, PRESERVE AND RESTORE PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS;

(C) COMPILE AND MAINTAIN INFORMATION RESOURCES SUCH AS A NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY AND A NATIONAL UNION CATALOGUE;

(D) PROVIDE INFORMATION, CONSULTATION, RESEARCH OR LENDING SERVICES, AS WELL AS ANY OTHER SERVICES FOR THE PURPOSE OF FACILITATING ACCESS TO THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE;

(E) ESTABLISH PROGRAMS AND ENCOURAGE OR ORGANIZE ANY ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING EXHIBITIONS, PUBLICATIONS AND PERFORMANCES, TO MAKE KNOWN AND INTERPRET THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE;

(F) ENTER INTO AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES OR INSTITUTIONS IN AND OUTSIDE CANADA;

(G) ADVISE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS CONCERNING THE MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION PRODUCED OR USED BY THEM AND PROVIDE SERVICES FOR THAT PURPOSE;

(H) PROVIDE LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION FOR LIBRARY SERVICES OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS;

(I) PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE AND IN PROVIDING ACCESS TO IT; AND

(J) CARRY OUT SUCH OTHER FUNCTIONS AS THE GOVERNOR IN COUNCIL MAY SPECIFY.

8. (2) IN EXERCISING THE POWERS REFERRED TO IN PARAGRAPH (1) (A) AND FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRESERVATION, THE LIBRARIAN AND ARCHIVIST MAY TAKE, AT THE TIMES AND IN THE MANNER THAT HE OR SHE CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE, A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF THE DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL OF INTEREST TO CANADA THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC WITHOUT RESTRICTION THROUGH THE INTERNET OR ANY SIMILAR MEDIUM.

Assessment: National libraries and archives have embraced their ability to capture Internet materials. LAC began to acquire a variety of targeted Internet materials including Government of Canada and provincial government websites but suspended this activity in 2009. Recently a modest program appears to have been re-started but much more remains to be done.

Recommendations:

- *Ex Libris believes that LAC needs to dramatically enhance its program to capture and organize this critical component of Canadian cultural expression.*
- *Ex Libris believes that LAC should enlarge the scope of its activities to become a centre of research to promote archival-library progress and networking in Canada across 'type of*

institution' lines, e.g. coordinate and collect statistics in all sectors on a regular basis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In its February Statement, ELA expressed the view that the 2004 merger of Canada's national library and national archives is worthy of reconsideration by Parliament given the detrimental experience of the past decade. Canada was originally thought to be a leader in developing this new service framework for a digital age, but the all-encompassing, generic integration of functions at this national institution has led to missteps that have taken LAC quite far from the Preamble, Objects and Powers of the 2004 Act. The two legislative committee reviews, in 2003 by the **Standing Committee** on Canadian Heritage and in 2004 by the **Senate Committee** on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, support this perspective.

Now is the time to reverse or alleviate the harmful effects of decisions and management actions that have taken place over the past several years. Let's not miss out on this opportunity.

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