

Ex Libris Association Statement on Library and Archives Canada, February 2013

Ex Libris Association Statement on Library and Archives Canada (LAC)

After 2004, when the functions of a national library, archives, and potential museum were assumed by LAC under new legislation, various studies were undertaken to determine what LAC might achieve and how it might serve Canadians. Generally, it was established that LAC would (1) be a new knowledge institution; (2) provide national leadership and focus to library and archives; (3) cooperate and work with other groups to strengthen the whole of Canada's heritage; (4) be a national public learning institution; and (5) be a leader in government information management.

How has LAC fared since 2004? How do its library policies and operations measure up when examined using basic yardsticks like the Information and documentation: Performance Indicators for National Libraries, adopted by the International Federation of Library Associations in 2009? Has it lived up to the spirit of the International Council of Archives Universal Declaration on Archives, adopted in 2010, to support the growth of archival activity in Canada? Currently, does it have adequate federal funding to maintain and develop its services to the public?

After examining the past nine years, 2004-2013, ELA has concluded in a separate backgrounder—LAC Service Decline—that LAC is wanting in many areas and actions.

Collections

In 2009, LAC halted paid acquisitions to review its activities. As a result, new non-government archival materials, special manuscripts, and books no longer receive the attention they deserve and its section for private archives has basically been dismantled. The concept of "total archives," a Canadian contribution to archival thought, no longer has relevance at LAC. Further, LAC announced in 2012 it was significantly cutting back on government publications from provinces and also foreign content.

In 2005, LAC began to frame a "Canadian Digital Information Strategy." However, after releasing reports in 2007 and 2010, LAC essentially ended its role as a facilitator of the process and announced its own plans to phase out paper and "go digital" with theses, government publications, and a digital repository essentially for government purposes even though many Canadians do not have Internet access.

Despite repeated pronouncements about ramping up its digital operations in 2012, LAC actually reduced its budget and staffing for this activity. External estimates of LAC's ability to digitize its own current resources extend beyond this century and LAC has not indicated how it plans to accomplish its policy.

Access

Since 2007, LAC has deliberately reduced direct public reference access at 395 Wellington Street despite repeated protests from groups and individuals and its own "advisory" groups. Currently, Genealogy Services remains adequately staffed; otherwise it is necessary to book staff appointments. Email responses are not an adequate substitute for many users. Also, LAC ended its long-standing activity of mounting exhibitions at 395 Wellington Street in 2010 in favour of travelling exhibitions and loans adding an austere atmosphere to the public face of this building.

In 2011, LAC eliminated live chat service without explanation although many libraries use this method to interact with clients. LAC repeatedly indicates it intends to better utilize electronic methods to reach Canadians (such as podcasts, Twitter, and Facebook) but these substitutes do not allow for extended assistance.

In 2012, LAC formed an advisory group to discuss the future of AMICUS, Canada's national catalogue of holdings, with a view to downgrading standards for its content and to outsourcing its development after it terminated most of its cataloguers. Archival description has also been reduced for many records.

In 2012, LAC ceased its longstanding "full service" operations in interlibrary loan, a retrograde step for a national organization. After terminating ILL staff, it formed an "advisory" group to formulate a new plan for its interlibrary loan activities, essentially to become a "lender of last resort."

Cooperation

In 2007, LAC dismantled the Council of Federal Libraries (est. in 1976) and only retained the successful purchasing consortium developed by this agency. Presently, LAC does not have an identified strategy to maintain and support federal government library collections and services in departments and agencies.

In 2008, LAC unilaterally closed its Book Exchange Centre for Canadian libraries, opened in 1974.

In 2009, LAC ended funding for the successful Archival Community Digitization Program resulting in a loss of more than \$500,000 annually for work by organizations across the country.

In 2010, LAC announced closure of its Learning Centre website despite protests by the Canadian Teachers Federation and other school organizations that used the products aimed at students and teachers.

In 2009, LAC's substantial work to provide assistance for the Initiative for Equitable Library Access to plan for the needs of Canadians with print disabilities ended with a short report and no further activity after years of effort and considerable expenditure.

Leadership

In 2010, LAC cancelled a film screening of "Iranium," but was directed by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, James Moore, who disapproved of this setback to intellectual freedom, to reschedule the program immediately.

In 2012, LAC ended \$1.7 million support for the National Archival Development Program. About 90 projects across Canada were cancelled. Archival organizations withdrew from LAC's newly formed umbrella group, the Pan-Canadian Heritage Program, due to LAC's "controlled agendas" and the failure of meaningful dialogue at meetings.

In 2012, LAC withdrew from the Association of Research Libraries, North America's premier organization for large research organizations, e.g., Library of Congress and principal Canadian libraries.

In 2012, Daniel J. Caron's keynote speech at the Canadian Library Association in Ottawa underwhelmed his audience. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Caron cancelled his address scheduled for the Association of Canadian Archivists.

Ex Libris response to LAC's lackluster record

As a knowledge institution, LAC is struggling under debatable priorities and recent federal budget cuts. Since 2011, various groups, such as the Canadian Association of University Teachers, Canadian Association of Law Libraries, and Bibliographical Society of Canada, have begun to challenge LAC's priorities and activities. Ex Libris wrote to the Minister of Canadian Heritage in February 2012 indicating our members concern with LAC's direction and budgetary priorities and followed with a letter in May protesting budget cuts. No responses were received from the Minister of Canadian Heritage or LAC.

In view of LAC's unconvincing performance after 2004, ELA calls for a thorough review of LAC's mandate and operations by Parliament, the authority that establishes and funds LAC. Most people have forgotten that the initial report on the future of the National Library and National Archives in 1999 did not recommend amalgamation. It favoured the continuation of two separate agencies.

ELA is in favour of a national library and archives that is proactive, transparent, and accountable for its policies and actions. According to current legislation, LAC is charged

- to acquire and preserve the nation's documentary heritage;
- to make that heritage known to Canadians and to anyone with an interest in Canada and to facilitate access to it;
- 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;
- to facilitate the management of information by government institutions;
- to coordinate the library services of government institutions; and
- to support the development of the library and archival communities.

ELA believes LAC is failing to make progress in most of these areas and takes the following positions.

ELA is opposed to LAC's unilateral decision-making by its repeated use of ad hoc administrative announcements on service changes or closures, its contrived use of advisory groups, the minimal significance it places on input by library and archival groups, and the consequent transfer of responsibilities and costs to other libraries.

ELA is opposed to LAC's ill-advised disproportionate commitment to digital operations to the detriment of "analogue" content (LAC newspeak for non-digital forms) in its collection and service priorities.

ELA is opposed to LAC's deprofessionalization of its workforce and to reductions to services to the public and to Canada's libraries and archives provided by professional librarians, archivists, and technical staff by relying primarily on electronic substitutes via the Internet.

ELA is opposed to LAC's non-consultative manner in dealing with national issues, such as cessation of the National Archival Development Program and sweeping reductions to interlibrary loan services.

ELA supports the concept of LAC acquiring published book and non-book materials as well as private and Government of Canada archival materials by all means—legal deposit, purchase, gift, exchange and transfer—in order to maintain a comprehensive library of Canadian content for preservation and long-term access purposes. ELA is opposed to fragmentation of collections by distribution to other institutions.

ELA favours continuation of national library and archival network operations, comprehensive national bibliographic records and archival descriptions, a Canadian digital strategy for libraries and archives, and related international liaison funded by LAC and having LAC as the central node.

ELA supports the concept of LAC providing national leadership through forums for research, regional and national support for all types of libraries and archives, and specific, long-term schemes that help Canadians achieve the best possible access for research and learning.

ELA believes that LAC should be more proactive in working with schools, libraries, archives, and museums to provide educational content, services, and interloans to the public, students, and researchers.

Finally, Ex Libris supports efforts to have a committee of Parliament review LAC's failings (and few successes) since 2004 in order to confirm its comprehensive mandate to collecting and public services and to examine its leadership role. ELA is opposed to legislative amendments that would legitimize existing reduced service levels developed since 2004 or significantly alter its current legislative objectives.

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