

May 1, 2020

Spring 2020 Advocacy Update

The mission of the BC Public Library Partners is to clarify and amplify public library advocacy. We work cooperatively to articulate the overarching provincial funding requirements that anchor public libraries as vital community institutions. We believe that working together increases the opportunities for positive promotion of public libraries which, in turn, helps us make the case for stable and increased funding.

Prior to the formation of the BC Public Library Partners in 2018, library organizations were fortunate to get one face-to-face meeting with the Minister of Education per year. And at this meeting, the Minister often heard about multiple issues facing public libraries and had no clear framework to determine provincial priorities. With so many messages, it was hard for any Minister to understand what public libraries needed, the critical role public libraries play in their communities, and how supporting libraries was politically positive.

The past two years have witnessed a remarkable shift in the relationship between the public library sector and elected members of the provincial government. The Partners now meet quarterly with the Minister of Education, in addition to less formal meetings at the BC Library Conference. When there's something important such as the budget lock up or the recent announcement of the one time \$3M funding, the Minister thinks of us and makes sure we're informed.

The Partners also meet regularly Ministry of Education key staff such as Assistant Deputy Minister McCrea and Mari Martin, Director of the Libraries Branch, MLA's and other government stakeholders. At these meetings we articulate a cohesive message that supports and informs important conversations happening at government committee tables. This level of government access, formal and informal, lets us discuss the strategic role that libraries play in achieving provincial objectives while highlighting the significant work public libraries do in their communities.

The \$20M in 2020 campaign was the first broad-based advocacy message developed by the BC Public Library Partners. Based on a realistic understanding of what the government might afford, and including a clear outline of past library cuts, the \$20M in 2020 campaign combined a hopeful message with a demonstrated need. This message resonated with Public Library Boards, management, staff and library stakeholders such as CUPE BC and CUPE National.

Our message, while not fully successful, was heard. The recent one-time \$3M grant to the public library sector is a direct response to the \$20M in 2020 campaign and the first major funding increase to the sector in a decade. The Partners noted how much of the language from this grant came directly from a previous funding request the Partners put together in 2018. This tells us that the government is listening to what we're saying.

Going forward, the BC Public Library Partners will be focusing on three strategic initiatives:

- Preparing a provincial message to share with the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government - the consultations are scheduled to begin in June 2020;
- Creating a template letter for our members and supporters to use during the consultations; and

- Determining next steps to build on the \$20M in 2020 Campaign to enhance the message for 2021.

Increasing and sustaining provincial funding for BC's public libraries is the goal of the BC Public Library Partners. Achieving this goal is only possible with the support of individual library systems, and with other public library organizations and stakeholders.

Thank you for your past support, and thank you for being hopeful with us about the future.

Sincerely,

The BC Public Library Partners

Association of BC Public Library Directors (ABCPLD)
BC Library Association (BCLA)
BC Libraries Cooperative (BCLC)
BC Library Trustees Association (BCLTA)