

SHORT REPORT TO THE TPL BOARD ON THE OLA SESSION ON THE “BUILDING VALUES TOGETHER” REPORT

Meyer Brownstone, Feb 3 2002.

The three hour session was designed to review the BVT report, the comments received to date on the report, and to elicit responses from among the 100 delegates attending the session.

The chair of the Core Management Team of the Strategic Directions Council, Jane Horrocks, (Richmond Hill) reviewed the report itself. (This report was circulated to this Board at its last meeting and a summary of its contents should not be necessary in this short report.)

Steve Salmons (Windsor) reviewed the responses and the questions raised. *What was indicated in this summary and in my reading of the responses was that what will be published for discussion is some distance from consensus within the library community.*

These are the questions raised in Mr. Salmon's presentation:

1. How will the projected Ontario Public Library (OPL) benefit the user libraries?
2. How does the OPL differ from the present constellation of groupings, associations and provincial structures?
3. Does the OPL replace the local library?
4. What about local funding for the OPL and its impact on present local funding?
5. For whom is this document being presented - the public, the library community, local and provincial government?
6. What are the benefits to local libraries?
7. How is the OPL to be governed?
8. What services will it provide?

The session then heard from five panelists who were quite divided in terms of support for and criticism of the report.

-(Mississauga First Nations) raised serious questions about the gross inequality of library services to First Nations and was concerned about the possibility that the “one voice” theme of the report would drown out the relatively weak voice of the First Nations. Refunding and restructuring of existing regional and provincial bodies was advanced as an option.

-(Dryden) expressed general concern and supported the view that existing bodies might fill the coordination and common services bill. Concern was also expressed about the members and staff of existing coordinating and service bodies.

-(Woodstock) was supportive of the OPL proposal arguing that the new context for libraries demanded a new structure and a new voice, one which would permit speaking and acting collectively.

-(Hamilton) was supportive and suggested advantages for rural libraries and young people.

-(Temagami) was also generally supportive but was really basically concerned with funding for the North pointing out that her Board could not afford to send delegates.

In the group discussion of our group (there was not reporting back from all groups) some of the above questions were raised again and some new ones added:

1. The report was too heavily weighted toward administration and structure and not enough to a fundamental vision which should have been put up front in the report and not included at the end, i.e. “not buried by structure”.
2. The report lacked direction towards a “community partnership” in terms of both the users of libraries and in terms of the linkage of library functions to a broad community of public and private services. This was related to the growing need for advocacy to defend the library system, promote its values and expand the level of public resources at local and provincial levels.
3. The fundamental issue of equalization was raised both with respect to first nations and rural communities in the North and South - an issue which can be dealt with in only a very limited way within the library system and depends primarily on provincial distributive capacity and powers. It was suggested that the OPL could not offer significant equalization without provincial involvement.

The session ended with an outline of next steps by Jane Horrocks. They consist of:

1. Printing and distributing the report (Feb.);
2. Tasking the team to develop a Business Plan to address issues such as function, funding and governance via a consultancy; a primary task will be to secure funding for the consultancy;
3. Producing a business case;
4. Consulting the library community;
5. Completing the business plan phase;
6. Implementing.

COMMENTS:

* Given the wide range of questions raised re the report itself and the obvious division within the OLA, it is difficult to imagine the process proceeding to the business plan phase without some reconsideration by the Council and the Core Management Team, with the object of at least first developing some general options with respect to the OPL and some of its projected functions as part of the terms of reference for the business plan.

* The basic issue of province-wide equalization raised implies initial advocacy at the provincial level for increased and equalized funding for libraries and for programmes such as high speed networks as discussed below. No library board is operating in a comfortable surplus situation and to consider significant equalization among the boards is unrealistic. At the same time advocacy will require development of both a political base and political strategies focused on the libraries. The fact that libraries are documented as being one of the most used and popular of public services (indeed all services, public and private) does indicate a potential base for advocacy but one which has been cultivated on a very limited and typically localized manner.

* The province has shown some interest in the process to date, but its future interest in funding equalization or more general support for libraries is unknown as is its view of the organization and control of the projected OPL which may emerge as a recommended provincial agency. One test of ongoing provincial interest will be in the funding of the development of the business plan.

*** The TPL role to date has been supportive in terms of participation on the various groups working on the BVT Report. In terms of the potential impact of any major changes and the contribution which the TPL can make to the technical and policy issues, it is essential that this relationship continue in the next steps, with increased Board review and discussion as the process and plan unfold.

A QUESTION

· In this session while the whole question of IT and the Internet were raised frequently as they were in the report, there was no discussion of the “broadband” issue (other sessions of the OLA may have discussed the question). We are all aware of the recent failure to develop federal support for a national access strategy, but there is in fact significant progress in at least three of the provinces. Alberta has announced a Super Net programme. Saskatchewan has a Community Net programme and Manitoba is preparing its Community Connections programme. In all of these, all provincial and local governments are being given very high speed access to the Internet although the methods and funding vary - Alberta is planning to extend the system to businesses and consumers at somewhat lower speeds on an equalized cost of access basis. Ontario apparently has shown interest but no determination at this point. This kind of provincial programme is a powerful tool for developing an aspect of equality so far absent. Presumably it is inferred but not specified in the report proposal “to provide electronic information, supportive infrastructure, expertise and funding to deliver equitable access to all Ontarians”. (The enlarged Alberta scheme will cost \$300 millions - primarily for installation of the fibre line).