

Funding for the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS)

Date:	March 22, 2021
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

This report recommends that the Library Board engage in advocacy to support two non-profit organizations that provide access to books and other materials for people with print disabilities through public libraries in Canada.

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) have launched a public advocacy campaign in response to the federal government's plans to cut \$1 million this year from accessible book funding which is shared by CELA and NNELS, and continue to cut an additional \$1 million each year until all federal funding is eliminated in 2025.

As a result of these cuts, CELA alone is facing an immediate shortfall of \$750,000. This will have significant impacts on the production and distribution of accessible reading materials for the one in 10 people who have a print disability in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. Engages in the CELA and NNELS public advocacy campaign with letters to federal government ministries and local MPs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact to this report.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

Toronto Public Library's (TPL) Strategic Plan (2020-2024) *Vital to Toronto – Building Success, Resilience and Well-Being for our City* provides the strategic directions for the next five years. The focus on equity in the strategic plan is a core element of the plan with a commitment to breaking down barriers to access and increasing inclusion.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

It is well-recognized that people with disabilities are often underserved, facing barriers to accessing education, employment and services, and have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. People with print disabilities require equitable access to alternate format materials through their public libraries. CELA and NNELS are publicly funded to provide public libraries with these resources. Federal funding reductions to CELA and NNELS has a significant impact on the production and distribution of accessible reading materials to public libraries.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 15, 2014, the Library Board received communication from the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) regarding an award recognizing CELA's establishment and its commitment to the fundamental right of Canadians with print disabilities to have equitable access to library service, and reading material in the format of their choice delivered through Canada's public libraries.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2014/dec15/10.pdf>

https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2014/dec15/10_4.pdf

At its meeting on April 18, 2017, the Library Board endorsed a letter to communicate appreciation to The Honourable Eleanor McMahon, Ontario Minister, Tourism, Culture and Sport for the extension of provincial funding for CELA beginning April 1, 2017.

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/apr18/08-communications-combined.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

One in 10 people have print disabilities. That means there are at least 3 million Canadian residents who need reading material in alternate accessible formats. Print disabilities include low vision or blindness, learning disabilities such as dyslexia or physical disabilities such as Parkinson's, cerebral palsy and others which prevent people from using traditional print.

CELA

CELA is a national non-profit organization founded on the principle that public funding should support equitable public library service to Canadians with print disabilities. Prior to CELA, the CNIB Library, a charitable organization, had been the predominant supplier of materials for the visually impaired. In 2012, at the request of the federal government, CNIB developed a service model and business plan that proposed a publicly-funded national not-for-profit digital hub, separate from CNIB. Public libraries were the natural distribution network identified. CELA was launched in April 2014.

The ratification of the *Marrakesh Treaty*, and the enactment of the Government of Canada's *Accessible Canada Act*, have focused more national attention on accessible services, shining a light on the importance of the service CELA and NNELS provide to Canadians with print disabilities through Canadian public libraries.

CELA customers have borrowed over 10 million books and other media in accessible formats offered by CELA through public libraries - a number unimaginable and unattainable if each individual library were responsible for providing the service within their existing capacity.

With support across Canada, CELA receives funding from most provinces and territories including the Government of Ontario. CELA funding is used primarily to acquire source materials for production; facilitate and coordinate production and delivery; maintain the CELA website, catalogue items and digital infrastructure; support subscriptions to additional resources of alternate formatted materials; and support member libraries at a national level.

CELA's Collections and Services

While public libraries provide their communities with well-developed physical and digital collections, many of the standard formats, discovery tools and reading devices available to access these collections are not suitable for people with print disabilities.

In the case of TPL's collections, some materials - including large print, books on CD, and digital audio books and ebooks - meet the needs of only some customers with print disabilities. For many, these formats are often not fully accessible, and therefore

do not provide equitable access for people with print disabilities. Formats required often include braille, DAISY audio, and accessible electronic text such as DAISY Text or ePub 3. In addition, the number of titles available represent only a portion of what is required. It is estimated that only 10% of printed material is available in these alternate formats. This creates another inequity for Canadians who cannot access traditional print.

CELA directly addresses these challenges by enabling public libraries to offer an expanding collection of more than 800,000 accessible books in both digital and physical formats. By centralizing acquisitions, partnering with the largest producer of accessible material in Canada (CNIB) and the largest in the United States (Bookshare), CELA has demonstrated the capacity to offer Canadians with print disabilities local access to an equitable library service.

NNELS

The National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) is a repository of digital content for Canadian public libraries. NNELS works with international partners, libraries, readers, and publishers, especially Canadian, to make copies of books in accessible formats available to readers in Canada who have print disabilities. NNELS launched in December 2013. NNELS has funding from territorial governments and five provincial governments (not Ontario).

COMMENTS

Each year in Canada, people with print disabilities read more than 1 million accessible titles, and the majority are in physical formats. Studies have shown that choice in reading materials is essential for engaging students with print disabilities in academic and recreational reading – both crucial to future success. A reduction in funding for accessible books means a reduction in the choice of reading materials for anyone with a print disability.

With CELA's services, TPL is able to access resources which are comprehensive, efficient, cost effective and offers more value for its customers than TPL could ever achieve on its own. Each year, library staff order new and bestselling DAISY titles from CELA in Spring and Fall to add to the Library's Talking Book Collection. This collection includes DAISY discs and audiobooks for the exclusive use of customers with print disabilities. Since 2017 staff have ordered over 3,100 copies of fiction and non-fiction DAISY discs for our customers. CELA also provides TPL with catalogue records for these items. Staff also refer customers to CELA's robust online and braille collections.

CELA provides support for the national TD Summer Reading Club (TDSRC) program by providing input into the design and delivery of accessible program materials in various print and electronic formats including audio, large print, braille and Open Dyslexic

font. CELA's recommended reads titles in alternative formats including audio, braille and e-text, available through download or mail delivery, are another important feature of the TDSRC program.

The federal government's 2020 Fall Economic Statement included an announcement that CELA and NNELS shared annual funding of \$3 million will be reduced by 25% annually before ending entirely in 2024-2025. All those currently using CELA and NNELS services will see an immediate reduction in services if full funding is not restored. The first phase of funding reductions come into effect April 1, 2021. As a result of these cuts, CELA alone is facing an immediate shortfall of \$750,000. This will have significant impact on the production and distribution of accessible reading materials for the one in 10 people who have a print disability in Canada.

CELA and NNELS have launched a public advocacy campaign and are actively seeking to engage with the federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Hon. Carla Qualtrough, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Chrystia Freeland, and other MPs in an effort to have funding restored.

As a large public library system in Canada situated in such a complex urban centre, letters from the Toronto Public Library Board will help to bring greater attention to this important issue in an effort to achieve broader national support. In addition, staff will actively support the effort through social media channels and collaborations with library associations such as the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA), the Ontario Library Association (OLA), and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL).

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SIGNATURE

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