To: Toronto Public Library Board – April 19, 2004

From: City Librarian

Subject: **Sustaining Canada's Digital Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive ICT Networks**

Purpose:

To inform the Toronto Public Library Board of the proposal from the Council of Administrators of Large Urban Public Libraries of Canada (CALUPL) to Industry Canada, The Treasury Board of Canada, and Hon. John F. Godfrey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on Cities and to seek approval for a letter of support from the Toronto Public Library Board.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

(1) receive for information *Sustaining Canada's Digital Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive ICT Networks*;
(2) express its support for the proposal from the Council of Administrators of Large Urban Public Libraries of Canada to Industry Canada, The Treasury Board of Canada, and Hon. John F. Godfrey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on Cities, and
(3) provide Council, the appropriate City officials and local members of Parliament with the report and the Board's letter of support.

Background:

The Council of Administrators of Large Urban Public Libraries of Canada is an organization representing 36 urban public library systems, serving 13.6 million urban dwelling Canadians. Each system serves a city of more than 100,000 people. CALUPL's combined populations represent forty-two percent of the Canadian citizenry. Toronto Public Library is a member of CALUPL, represented by Josephine Bryant, City Librarian.

In December 1997 CALUPL presented a proposal to Industry Canada titled: *Connecting Canadians: an Urban Libraries Strategy for a Networked Nation*. That proposal resulted in the

Urban Community Access Program (Urban CAP) in 2000/2001, which funded Internet access in urban public libraries. The Urban Community Access Program was one component of the Government of Canada's *Connecting Canadians* agenda. The *Connecting Canadians* program, established in 1998, has had a tremendous impact on the Information Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure in communities across Canada. CALUPL urban libraries enabled more than 71 million electronic visits to the Internet and the Web between 1998 and 2003. The Urban CAP program's funding ended in 2003. Building on this success, CALUPL prepared a proposal for Industry Canada for a sustainable partnership model to build a socially inclusive digital society.

The proposal, *Sustaining Canada's Digital Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive ICT Networks*, was submitted to the Minister of Industry, the President of the Treasury Board and to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on cities on February 25, 2004. A copy of the proposal is provided as Attachment 1.

In 2000 the Library Board received two information reports about the application for Urban CAP funding. The Board Chair was briefed on the Urban CAP and Industry Canada funding in preparation for her meeting with the Deputy Minister for Industry Canada. At its March 29, 2004 meeting the Board agenda included communication to the Deputy Minister referencing the CALUPL proposal.

Comments:

Over the next five-year period, CALUPL envisions a multi-level strategy of connecting people to people, building a digital social inclusion, using CALUPL libraries' ICT (Information Communications Technology) networks, tools and human resources. Developments in ICT technologies, digital content, issues of privacy and security, virtual library services, and access to government online are defining a socially inclusive digital universe for all Canadians.

The proposal makes the following points:

- Internet technologies facilitate citizen engagement and social inclusion. Internet services such as e-mail, instant messaging, newsgroups, bulletin boards and web-based chat rooms are accessible at any public library with public Internet access.
- A critical dimension enabling inclusion and moreover, full participation, is that users have access to the necessary learning and social supports. Public libraries continue to meet that gap between formal and informal education systems, specifically in the area of information literacy.
- Urban public libraries have shown themselves to be proven partners in delivering value in the knowledge economy. Public libraries have partnered with other public and private organizations to deliver services; public libraries are building digital collections, virtual libraries and information portals; public libraries are access points for Canadians seeking government information and public libraries are providing individual and group training programs.

In the proposal, CALUPL requests:

- a partnership framework including federal, provincial, municipal or regional and private participation as outlined by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the federal government's New Deal for cities;
- a flexible funding formula, of $5,000 per library branch annually committed for a minimum of four successive years that will support digital skills training, infrastructure, connectivity and online learning;
- that the federal government license the Web Awareness Internet education program nationally; and
- that a program evaluation framework integrating stories and storytelling into the methodology and impacts assessment be used.

The importance of a partnership framework, including a funding formula, to Toronto Public Library can be shown by the results of the previous *Connecting Canadians* program.

- In 2000, Urban CAP funding provided $1.683 million for expanding public Internet access in branches, upgrading the Internet network to high speed service, providing Internet training, developing Internet content (TPL web site, SmallBizXpress gateway) and promoting the Library's Internet services.
- In 2001, the Sustainability Program for Internet Access provided $495,000 for 99 library locations. The funding helped sustain the following programs and services: free high speed access to the Internet, free Internet workshops and training, continued development of the Library's web site and the SmallBizXpress gateway.
- In 2003, the Sustainability Program for Internet Access 3 (SPIA3) provided $392,000 for 98 Library locations. The funding helped sustain and increase high-speed access to the Internet and supported on-going Internet training in Library branches.

Access to the Internet has become a key service offered by public libraries. The existing investment in public Internet access, the support infrastructure already in place including trained staff able to assist the public, the current hours of service that include evenings and weekends and the ability to attract external grant funding has positioned the Library as a primary community access point to e-government and other Internet services.

However, a key issue is the struggle to translate start-up funding into sustainable and indefinite funding. This issue manifests itself at all levels of government funding. Recent experiences with federal funding highlight some of the issues: lack of multi-year funding, short time-lines for expenditures, changes in funding criteria within multi-year funding programs and restrictions on funding infrastructure. The need for sustainable funding is not limited to Internet access infrastructure costs. The start-up funding to enhance content development, training, and information literacy programs creates additional sustainability pressures for libraries.

Only with sustained funding can libraries and community access centres maintain the ICT infrastructure required to provide free Internet access for Canadians. The challenge of maintaining the ICT infrastructure is not dissimilar to the federal/provincial/municipal discussion about cost-sharing for road, sewer, water transit and other physical infrastructure maintenance.

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What makes it even more pressing is that the renewal cycle for ICT infrastructure is a short four to five years.

The Government of Canada has made a significant investment in its *Connecting Canadians* program and has achieved connectivity for rural and urban communities across Canada. Public libraries have shown that they are effective partners in delivering new services made possible through the Connecting Canadians program. Without on-going investment in the renewal of the ICT infrastructure, investment will rapidly decline in value – in a short five years' time the computers will be too old to support current Internet browsers, and data communications equipment will not support improved higher speed connections.

Conclusion:

The recommendations in the CALUPL proposal encourage the development of framework for funding at all levels of government that can support and develop ICT and service delivery in public libraries. Therefore, it is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board express its support for the CALUPL proposal. Such expression of support would be made through a letter to the Minister of Industry and briefing of the Mayor's staff responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs and the CAO's staff responsible for Intergovernmental Relations.

Contact:

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Josephine Bryant
City Librarian

List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: *Sustaining Canada's Digital Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive ICT Networks,* a proposal from the Council of Administrators of Large Urban Public Libraries of Canada to Industry Canada, The Treasury Board of Canada, and Hon. John F. Godfrey, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on Cities - February 2004.
Attachment 2: Toronto Public Library Board letter of support dated April 19, 2004.

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