

DRAFT

April 19, 2004

The Honourable Lucienne Robillard
Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for the
Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec
11th Floor, East Tower
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5

The Honourable Reg Alcock
President of the Treasury Board
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat
L'Esplanade Laurier, 9th Floor, East Tower
140 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R5

The Honourable John Ferguson Godfrey, P.C., M.P.
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with special emphasis on Cities
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ministers,

The Toronto Public Library Board would like to express its support for the recommendations contained in *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 (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.

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.

Industry Canada funding through the Urban Community Access Program (2000/2001) and the Sustainability Program for Internet Access (2001/2002 and 2003/2004) has enabled Toronto Public Library to upgrade its Internet services to high-speed service, to provide free Internet training in 11 Learning Centres and to develop Internet content, such as our small business information portal, called SmallBizXpress.

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, like most public sector organizations we are under constant budget pressure. A key issue is the struggle to translate start-up funding into sustainable and indefinite funding. Only with sustained funding can libraries maintain the information and communications technology (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. What makes it even more pressing is that the renewal cycle for ICT infrastructure is a short 4 to 5 years. The need for sustainable funding is not limited to Internet access infrastructure costs. The start-up funding to enhance content development, training, information literacy programs creates additional sustainability pressures for libraries.

For these reasons and to leverage the current investment in ICT, the CALUPL brief proposes a model of socially inclusive information and communications technology (ICT) networks, with public libraries as the community anchors in service delivery and with matching funding and program support from federal and provincial governments in a formal partnership framework.

The Toronto Public Library Board commends to you the CALUPL proposal and looks forward to your response to the recommendations presented in the proposal, *Sustaining Canada's Digital Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive ICT Networks*.

Yours truly,

Gillian Mason, Chair

Attachment: Toronto Public Library Board Report – Sustaining Canada’s Digital
Capacity: an Urban Library Strategy to Sustain Socially Inclusive
CT Networks

cc A.A. (Sandy) Cameron, Chair, CALUPL and
Library Director, Regina Public Library
Barbara Clubb, Treasurer, CALUPL & Project Lead and
City Librarian, Ottawa Public Library