

S27: Trustee Roundtable

Philip Mantler, Secretary-Treasurer, BCLTA and Chair, Prince George Public Library

Philip Mantler of the BCLTA Board facilitated this general discussion session for public library trustees. In attendance were 26 trustees from 18 libraries around the province – from Coquitlam to Kitimat, Greater Victoria to Nelson, Okanagan Regional to Chetwynd. All regions of BC and all sizes and types of libraries were represented.

On the agenda were the following discussion topics:

- BC-Alberta Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA)
- Friends of the Library
- Library 2020
- Library Federations
- Liability Insurance
- Role of the Trustee
- Information on BCLTA

The session began with some general discussion on the topic **TILMA**, but it was decided that it would be best for those in attendance to review the legal analysis and information provided by BCLTA prior to the conference and to approach the BCLTA board and/or staff with any questions they may have. It was noted that the most significant implication of TILMA for public libraries is the reduction in library procurement thresholds (for goods from \$100,000 to \$75,000; for services from \$100,000 to \$75,000; and for construction from \$250,000 to \$200,000). It was also noted that BCLTA will be monitoring the impact of these new procurement thresholds on public libraries and invites the membership advise of any issues that arise in relation to these changes.

A discussion on **Friends of the Library** groups followed, with several trustees providing examples of how their friends groups are structured and what kinds of activities and fundraisers they undertake. The importance of good relations between friends groups and library boards was stressed, as was the need to work with friends to ensure that their capital purchases fit the library's operational needs and can be funded operationally in the long-term. It was noted that some friends groups purchase directly, and that if they are set up as their own Society then they are not subject to the TILMA provisions applying to libraries. Other groups prefer to cut a cheque and have the library make the purchase – in which case TILMA procurement restrictions can come into play. A trustee noted that direct access gaming grants can no longer be directed to capital projects, so the friends in his community are now donating to programming and literacy initiatives instead.

Session attendees moved into a discussion of **Library 2020** – seeking to clarify some of the history behind L2020 and understand where the initiative is going. Some discussion of the L2020 conference breakfast event took place, with attendees explaining that the session focused on the recent reports by Marleen Morris & Associates and sought to gather feedback and input as L2020 moves forward. Although many of the trustees stated their support for collaboration among and between libraries and library sectors, there was general confusion as to the purpose and rationale behind L2020 and a sense that the initiative has “put the cart before the horse” in terms of setting up a governance structure before there is anything to govern. Appreciation was expressed for the concept of collaboration emerging from the grassroots up, rather than being dictated from the top down.

Library federations were next on the agenda, with some newer trustees inquiring as to their purpose and mandate. It was explained that federations essentially exist to create efficiencies and work to the benefit of all the libraries in the region. Individual library membership in the federations is optional, but there are many benefits to being a member. For example, federations have their own budgets and can assist in sending trustees to conferences, undertaking group purchasing initiatives, funding initiatives such as Sitka, and providing capital funding for one-off projects such as library play centres for children.

In lieu of discussion, it was decided that the BCLTA would undertake some comprehensive research on the issue of **liability insurance** for library boards and individual board members and report back to the full membership on this topic.

A brief discussion on the **role of the library trustee** followed, with particular attention paid to the fact that the library board operates autonomously of council and council member appointees are in fact full board members rather than just liaisons between the board and council.

The session concluded with a question from one of the newer trustees in attendance about **BCLTA** and its purpose, mandate and activities. Attendees were directed to the BCLTA website for further information on the association, and were encouraged to contact the BCLTA board and staff with any questions they may have. It was stressed that BCLTA exists to serve trustees throughout the province – providing information and assistance where required, representing public library interests to the various levels of government, and liaising with other associations and groups to promote and enhance library service throughout BC.