

**Report to / Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Public Library Board  
Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa**

**May 14, 2019 / 14 mai 2019**

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**File Number:** OPLB-2019-0502

**SUBJECT: Digital Content Advocacy – Update**

**OBJET: Plaidoyer en faveur du contenu numérique – Mise à jour**

#### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Ottawa Public Library Board approve that the Chair of the Board seek Ottawa City Council's approval of a motion, as presented in document 1, in support of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council's sustained advocacy efforts.**

#### **RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil d'administration de la Bibliothèque publique d'Ottawa approuve que son président demande au Conseil municipal d'Ottawa d'adopter la motion présentée dans le document 1 en appui aux actions de promotion soutenues du Conseil des bibliothèques urbaines du Canada.**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Since 2015, the Ottawa Public Library Board (the Board) has been an active advocate for stronger access to, and fair pricing for, digital content in public libraries. Activities in support of advocacy have been reported to the Board in April 2015 (OPLB -2015-0034) and October 2015 (OPLB-2015-0084).

On March 4, 2019, the Board received an update regarding recent advocacy activities of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) eContent Working Group. These consisted of the following:

- *eContent for Libraries / Numérique pour les biblios* campaign: from January 14 to 25, 2019, Canadian public libraries, including Ottawa Public Library (OPL), joined forces to advocate for stronger digital content for libraries, drawing attention to the issues of digital audiobook access and fair digital content pricing; and,
- *One eRead Canada / Un livre! Canada*: an upcoming (June 2019) digital reading campaign, similar to a One Book, One Read program, but on a national scale and focused on the Canadian title *Glass Beads* by author Dawn Dumont.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the eContent for Libraries Campaign and to recommend further action from the Board with regards to digital content advocacy.

## DISCUSSION

Multinational publishers, primarily headquartered outside Canada, are limiting Canadian libraries access to digital publications, and, even when a publication is made available, are making it prohibitively expensive to acquire. By way of example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book *Kingdom of the Blind* is available to libraries for \$22 in paper format and \$60 in eBook format. The \$60 cost allows the eBook to be checked out electronically 52 times or for two years – whichever happens first. A paper edition would be expected to last three to four years at a substantially reduced cost.

The recent *eContent for Libraries / Numérique pour les biblios* advocacy campaign encouraged Canadians to use #eContentForLibraries or #NumeriquePourLesBiblios to spread the word and to voice concerns directly to multinational publishers. During the two-week period, the #eContentForLibraries hashtag appeared in 1,333 unique tweets and 2,058 retweets on Twitter and 110 unique posts on Instagram. The French-language hashtag #NumeriquePourLesBiblios was not used extensively, with fewer than 30 mentions recorded. The eContent for Libraries website provided customers with publishers' Facebook, Twitter, and email contact, along with suggested wording for tweets and Facebook posts. As a result, multinational publishers were mentioned in 707 unique tweets.

OPL participated in the campaign by responding to media inquiries and generating social media discussions among customers. The Board also participated by retweeting and, through the Chair, by issuing a letter to CEOs of multinational publishers, advocating for better access to, and fair pricing for, digital content.

The campaign has had a positive impact. In the second week of the campaign, a multinational publisher reached out to CULC to discuss the highlighted issues. They have committed to setting up a Canadian advisory board of librarians and to checking and acquiring Canadian rights for audiobook titles that are available in U.S. libraries.

To build on the momentum of the #eContentforLibraries campaign, CULC is entering a new phase, extending outreach to municipal and federal political leaders to attract attention, gain public support, and advocate for solutions that can assist in continuing to provide core digital library services to communities.

CULC is seeking assistance of its members, including OPL, in increasing government and stakeholder awareness of the negative impacts that obstacles to acquiring digital publications have on libraries and to work with governments on a solution that would benefit library customers and Canadian authors.

CULC's sustained advocacy approach has two facets:

Municipal: to build upon the existing relationships that many CULC members have with their municipal leaders to increase local government understanding of digital access issues and to generate municipal support for these issues; and,

Federal: Building upon the municipal outreach, a strategy for outreach to Members of Parliament (MPs) and key Federal Cabinet Ministers is being developed and will be implemented throughout 2019, with the goal of generating bi-partisan agreement on supporting public libraries and the need for public libraries in the 21st century to have robust digital collections. Although public libraries are a provincial issue, the Federal government is best-placed to provide a comprehensive, Canada-wide solution to the digital access issues.

OPL staff recommend that the Board endorse CULC's sustained advocacy efforts and participate at the municipal level by introducing a motion to Ottawa City Council in support of digital content advocacy (Document 1). Staff recommend that the Chair bring this matter forward to Ottawa City Council on behalf of the OPL Board. If approved at

City Council, staff recommend that the motion be forwarded to Members of Parliament representing constituencies within Ottawa and the Federal Minister of Canadian Heritage (a sample letter is provided in Document 2).

## **CONSULTATION**

Input was collected from CULC, Canadian public libraries, and the OPL management team.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk implications associated with this report

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Stronger access to digital content will increase OPL's purchasing power, thereby increasing the number of digital copies/titles available to all customers.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

Stronger access to digital audiobooks will increase the number of titles available for customers with print disabilities.

## **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

## **BOARD PRIORITIES**

The recommendations are aligned with the Board's strategic direction and priority: Services that are customer centric: Provide physical and digital collections that are responsive to customer demands and community needs.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1    Recommendations to Ottawa City Council: Stronger Digital Content for Public Libraries

Document 2    Proposed Text for Letter to Federal Members of Parliament

**DISPOSITION**

Upon approval of the recommendations, staff will:

1. Work with Chair Tierney to bring forward a motion to Ottawa City Council;
2. Work with CULC to support their sustained advocacy efforts; and,
3. Continue to update the Board on the outcome of these efforts.

## **Recommendations to Ottawa City Council: Stronger Digital Content for Public Libraries**

### OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY RECOMMENDATIONS

That Ottawa City Council:

1. Recognize the important role that public libraries play in the community through early literacy programs that are integral to developing proficient readers and ensuring that children succeed in school and digital literacy programs that help ensure that citizens can contribute to the digital world;
2. Recognize that public libraries must be able to offer digital publications to their customers as part of their core service offering to the community, particularly given the digital divide and the contemporary rapid pace of digitization of educational and cultural materials;
3. Indicate its support for the Ottawa Public Library and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council in efforts to increase access to digital publications for public library customers in the City of Ottawa and across Canada;
4. Call on the Federal government to investigate the barriers faced by public libraries in acquiring digital publications and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada; and,
5. Further ask the Federal government to develop a solution that increases access to digital publications across Canada and assists public libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire digital publications.

### **Proposed Text for Letter to Federal Members of Parliament**

This is to advise you that the Council of the City of Ottawa, at its meeting of June 12, 2019 considered and carried a motion pertaining to Stronger Digital Content for Public Libraries.

We recognize the important role that public libraries play in the community through early literacy programs that are integral to developing proficient readers and ensuring that children succeed in school and digital literacy programs that help ensure that citizens can contribute to the digital world.

We also learn that public libraries must be able to offer digital publications to their customers as part of their core service offering to the community, particularly given the digital divide and the contemporary rapid pace of digitization of educational and cultural materials.

We support Ottawa Public Library and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council in efforts to increase access to digital publications for public library customers in the City of Ottawa and across Canada.

Ottawa City Council calls upon the Federal government to investigate the barriers faced by public libraries in acquiring digital publications and the problems that poses for vulnerable demographic groups in Canada.

We further ask the Federal government develop a solution that increases access to digital publications across Canada and assists public libraries in meeting the cost requirements to acquire digital publications.

Ottawa Public Library spends more than \$5M every year to acquire publications and other resources in demand by library customers. Even with this significant expenditure, OPL finds it difficult to obtain digital publications from multinational publishers, due to cost pressures and the often-strict licensing limitations applied to digital publications. By way of example, Canadian author Louise Penny's book *Kingdom of the Blind* is available to libraries for \$22 in paper format and \$60 in digital form. The \$60 cost would allow the book to be checked out electronically 52 times or for two years – whichever happens first. A paper edition would be expected to last three to four years at a substantially reduced cost.

If libraries can not correctly serve library customers and provide access to digital publications, the community will suffer. The Federal government has a vital role to play in ensuring that Canadian libraries can meet the growing demand for digital publications. We ask you to prioritize finding a solution for the barriers that Canadian libraries face in accessing digital publications.