

Council of Federal Libraries

Toward Renewed Federal Libraries—Pursuing Our Strategic Planning

A “Think Tank”

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Opening

Welcome and Purpose of the Day

Marilyn Osborne, Director General, Government Information Management Office, Library and Archives Canada

After welcoming the delegates, Marilyn Osborne explained that the objective of the day’s session was to move forward on creating a long-term strategic plan for the role of federal libraries, federal librarians, and the Council of Federal Libraries (CFL). The participants, she said, were the “thought leaders” of the process, and had been invited as key stakeholders representing the work that needs to be done to go forward. She then invited facilitator Lise Pigeon to begin the session.

Agenda, Process, and Participant Introductions

Lise Pigeon, Facilitator

Lise Pigeon explained that the meeting was not intended as a formal visioning exercise, but rather as a session to identify the “drivers for change.” The participants would engage in both large-group and table discussions on what might be the key elements and directions for advancing a vision for the future of federal libraries. Pigeon then invited the participants to introduce themselves and their organizations, and to share one issue of interest or concern regarding the future of libraries and librarians in the Public Service.

The delegates raised a number of issues. First, librarians must leverage their competencies without losing their sense of community. Librarians must make greater efforts to connect with the needs of the library science (LS) community and increase mutual exchange.

The problem of diminishing requirements for LS as a discipline—in particular, for a Master’s degree in LS—was raised. To drive the development of competencies, respect for the profession is necessary. How can the visibility of librarians be raised in the world of information management (IM)? How can their strategic role be redefined and positioned, and the “power” of librarians maintained? How can librarians link up the vision and their “traditional” competencies with technical IM competencies? In particular, librarians must ensure that program service delivery providers understand the potential role librarians can play in helping them with their programs.

Delegates also said it is important to consider whether the management of all the new functions can realistically be integrated. What impact do these new functions have on librarians’ competencies? Should these functions be written into librarians’ job descriptions, as a step toward increasing the recognition?

Concerning the information itself, participants pointed out that librarians can use their expertise and knowledge to raise awareness of information as an important asset. They

must ensure Ministers and others at high levels understand and pay attention to the role and importance of IM. Delegates also expressed the need to ensure that access to information is seamless, universal, and equitable.

Participants said they felt the role of libraries needs to be redefined and re-evaluated. In particular, they said, it is necessary to go beyond the term “library.” This word is constraining, although the profession itself is not. A separation of librarians from libraries may be helpful.

Delegates also noted that librarian communities must articulate their values and find shared indicators for tracking progress from year to year. They must also ensure that the existing network of library services is not superseded by, but rather is used as a network for, IM.

Another key point raised was the need to move forward from thinking and strategizing to developing plans and taking action.

Context Setting and Environmental Scan

Strategic Planning for Federal Libraries and Librarians

Marilyn Osborne

Osborne gave an overview of the drivers of change and the strategic planning process for federal libraries and librarians. She first noted that the federal librarians’ community is a true community of practice in that there is no single leader but a set of horizontal connections across many departments. Therefore, it is important for the delegates to leverage knowledge within their own departments and recognize that the planning process may be very iterative.

Osborne then spoke on the changing paradigm of federal libraries and librarians. First, the term “library” itself is giving way to terms such as “knowledge centre” or “information centre,” reflecting the shift of focus from physical books to information itself. Second, the world of librarians is changing significantly—not all libraries now are run by librarians, and not all librarians work in libraries—and librarians are facing an increasing role within the federal government to provide commonly shared, client-centered services within the IM world.

Thus, access is the primary driver. Today, the term refers to access to information rather than to physical publications. Technology is another driver, one that enables, but also presents challenges. For example, “In the world of Google, why do we need librarians?” is a genuine question. A third driver is the fact that today’s clients and information professionals are much more able to find, access, organize, and analyze information on their own.

When the CFL met earlier this year, Osborne said, the issues raised included the following:

- positioning and strategic planning;
- limited funding and stagnating budgets;
- human resource questions such as career paths, competencies, and succession planning; and
- physical space planning.

To learn the root causes of all of these challenges, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) developed an “IM Capacity Check” exercise for government departments. Approximately 27 government departments completed the check. The results identified two key priorities common within the departments and across government in general. One was leadership support for IM, both within each department and at the highest ministerial levels. The other priority was operational and tactical in nature: a need for common tools.

To meet today’s change and challenges, Osborne suggested first developing a thorough understanding of the bigger Government of Canada context, then pursuing more analysis aimed at distinguishing between libraries and librarians, demonstrating and aligning their value and relevance in the changing paradigm, embracing and harnessing technology, and building services to meet the needs of today’s Internet-enabled clients.

The future vision begins today, Osborne said, and the next steps are to complete the strategy work and create a concrete action plan. She invited Sharon Henhoeffler to give a presentation that would set the context for the day’s strategy work.

Context Setting

Sharon Henhoeffler, Consultant

Sharon Henhoeffler gave a presentation on her work related to a study led by LAC to define an “information management value proposition” for the Government of Canada. The study aimed to raise the awareness of senior government officials around the importance of IM within the federal government. Its outcome, the value proposition, is to act as a foundation piece for a common IM vision, framework, and context for the federal government. The presentation also included an overview of the leadership viewpoints on IM that emerged in the interviews she conducted with more than 60 people in senior IM management positions.

Henhoeffler began by noting that the interviewees generally had many concerns around expressing the value proposition. One barrier that was mentioned was that government currently does not recognize information as a key government asset, and senior officials have too many other priorities. Another was that IM has no consistent scope and definition, since it is intangible and complex and encompasses many areas, including policy, service delivery, and accountability. Moreover, IM’s future value must be in terms of the business of government and the electronic world, which are beyond the current focus on archiving, library sciences, and record management. Furthermore, senior

officials expect quantitative analysis, whereas the value of IM is more “qualifiable” in nature. There is also a stigma that the value of IM has already been defined by the value of information technology (IT).

Henhoeffter then reviewed the key elements of the value proposition. First, government must recognize information as its most strategic asset. It must also recognize that IM aids in decision making and is vital to supporting government priorities and policy making, enabling service delivery, building knowledge, and providing accountability and transparency. In short, good IM results in a more effective and efficient government.

Henhoeffter noted that the value of IM has steadily augmented as the volume and complexity of information and its processing have increased, and in particular as the emphasis has grown on horizontality, service transformation, and whole-of-government approaches from both internal-to-government and external-client perspectives.

Three major categories of leadership viewpoints emerged from the interviews: (1) the changing role of the IM environment and context, (2) opportunities, and (3) call to action. In terms of environment and context, senior officials noted that IM must broaden its technical focus in order to link to outcomes and priorities such as service transformation and the modernization of Public Service. IM governance also needs greater clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities, as well as a mandate concerning government outcomes and priorities.

In addition, government must better understand how the changing role of information, due to increased client expectations and the introduction of the Internet, is critical to meeting citizens’ demands and government outcomes. Moreover, there must be greater emphasis on taking full advantage of IM to better enable the day-to-day business of government. Government needs system-wide leadership and accountability for IM.

In conclusion, Henhoeffter explained that her presentation represents a draft of the report to be made official at a later date. Osborne added that senior managers are reviewing the draft to determine strategic focus. After some final touches are applied, the report will be posted on the LAC website for the use of all government departments.

Osborne then invited Pigeon to introduce the next segment: the environmental scan.

Introduction to Environmental Scan

Lise Pigeon

Pigeon explained that the environmental scan is meant to build on what has been said up to the present. She invited the participants to brainstorm in groups about what other issues they feel define the context and environment in which federal libraries will evolve and operate in the next three to five years. Because the environment is so huge, she asked that each table focus on one of four themes—Government of Canada (GOC) big picture, technology, clients, and libraries and librarians—based on a set of suggested questions.

The common thread among the proposed questions is the issue of how to transform threats into opportunities. Pigeon illustrated this point with several examples:

- Blacksmiths, whose traditional skills (such as making horseshoes) faced a sharp decline in demand after the arrival of the automobile, adapted to the new environment by redefining their profession to specialize in the ironwork that car manufacturers needed.
- McDonald’s restaurants, after expanding worldwide, added new foods to its menu, going beyond hamburgers to offer chicken, fish, salad, different ethnic flavours, etc., to cater to different tastes.
- The War Amps charity, after more and more veterans passed away or no longer needed as much help, changed its focus to one of supporting child and other amputees.

Pigeon noted that of the three examples, one focused on profession, one on product, and one on clientele, but they all showed how potential threats had been turned into opportunities.

Reports Back

Theme 1: Government of Canada / Public Service Big Picture

These questions were posed to the group as a framework for discussion:

- What are the current big issues and preoccupations of the Government of Canada and the Public Service leadership?
- How do federal libraries fit into these preoccupations?
- In what ways does the Public Service / Government of Canada environment represent both opportunities and challenges for federal libraries?

First, the group identified several key messages within the Government of Canada big picture. There is a great deal of change within the federal government, with an emphasis on the ability to work not only vertically but also horizontally across departments and different levels of government. Thus, collaborating and sharing information, services, and delivery are becoming increasingly important. These are areas in which libraries and librarians can support and assist.

Discussing values and ethics, delegates raised the point that Public Service management is moving in the direction of responsiveness, accountability, and transparency. IM is the foundation of Public Service work; the value of information lies in aiding decision making in the business of government. While expenditure reviews are constantly concerned with cutting budgets and tightening control, the focus needs to be on the value chain and on how program service delivery is meeting outcomes. Moreover, the decisions involved in this work continue to require more and better information.

Participants also mentioned training as another key issue. To support people’s continuous learning and development, funding is needed. Investment in the people who work in the IM and library communities is important. Training needs include both orientation training and testing. The lack of staff continuity was also mentioned as a challenge, especially when staff turnover is frequent or extreme. The final key message discussed was the importance of separating the role of libraries from that of librarians.

Next, the group discussed what these messages mean for libraries and librarians. The need for information is rising all across government, and therefore the importance of librarians is increasing. The importance of competencies in the library field is also growing, in areas such as accountability, IM, analytical skills, skills for finding information, and value added to support desired outcomes across business lines. An example of value added by librarians was the way that a researcher can rely on a librarian’s analytical skills to provide certified, useful information rather than having to sort through the thousands of answers that Google often generates. Librarians’ competencies also enable them to contribute to good IM processes, systems, and practices.

However, librarians must avoid making too big a leap from the increased importance of skills to the increased importance of IM and librarians. The challenge is to articulate well the skills and their relationship to librarians. Research and data on people’s perceptions will help with this articulation. Also, government needs to review its job classification structure and pay scales for LS and other related categories. LS training provides skills related to organizing and managing information, but may not provide the skill set needed for being a web master or content master.

Another issue is that the pressure to reduce costs is threatening to take away the physical space for libraries. While viewing libraries as “storefronts” that provide access to information that is stored in compact digital form or off-site can justify reducing expenditures on space, it is still necessary to provide a place for people to work quietly and a facility where they can seek help in finding information. As with McDonald’s changing menu, said a delegate, the nature of the space remains the same, but the services provided there are different. Another participant added that some research centres provide library space within their own facilities. An organization that has its own assistants and space to service its own clients may not need an external library or external librarians.

The participants then discussed the trend toward horizontality and its impact on the need for physical versus virtual library space. Even in the context of greater horizontality and more decentralized government, people still need physical spaces as meeting places; humans’ need to meet physically and see each other face to face has not been replaced by the arrival of email. However, providing access to spaces continues to be a real issue for federal government libraries. They are constantly under fire to reduce their collections, which means reducing assets, but they are still required to have information available. The group agreed that one response may be to focus on how space optimization will affect the clients and their specific needs across different business lines, since librarians need to serve as leaders to information interoperability in order to support horizontality.

Theme 2: Technology

The participants were provided with the following questions as a framework for their discussion:

- What is happening on the technology front that is or could have an impact on the nature/role of libraries?
- What scenarios for libraries in the future can we envisage from a technological perspective?
- In what ways does technology represent both opportunities and threats for federal libraries?

The group noted the following threats:

- The federal government shows IT reluctance. IT groups must take this issue seriously and augment the message that technology is good and should be used.
- Portal and Intranet fatigue are another difficulty. Users have too many choices.
- Virtual competitors such as Google also pose a threat.
- People have no time to use either physical or electronic libraries.
- There are too many ways of getting information. Each new option becomes the “flavour of the day,” then is replaced. Too much choice is imposing a barrier.

The group noted the following opportunities:

- Technology is wonderful for disseminating information.
- Technology advances allow web pages to be customized to respond to each client’s individual needs.
- Technology must take on a larger role and gain recognition as a champion within departments and on committees. Library committees and desktop tools committees are of particular importance.
- Library communities can take full advantage of branding as a way to achieve recognition and increase the focus on libraries. Ensuring that all communications contain the word “library” will help reinforce the meaning that libraries exist throughout the federal government and are places that use IT and provide information.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates supported the suggestion of branding, noting that libraries, like the War Amps, should change their services, but not their name. A participant recommended omitting the word “virtual” from relevant discussions, since even if the physical space is removed the information still exists.

Regarding the issue of open access, participants said that people can use libraries on their own but should know that librarians are there if they need assistance. Another threat raised was the difficulty for librarians of keeping up with the ever-changing technology. A participant suggested adding the word “interoperability” to the discussion on

opportunities.

Returning to the issue of branding, participants clarified that the term “library” should not become the new catchall term for IM. It is a more generic term that should be reinforced as a way to describe where information is found. To understand the term’s usefulness, a participant suggested focusing on the essential services—the outcome—provided by libraries rather than on the resources themselves, as in the term “resource centres.” People may realize they are the same, but the key is to articulate well the services based on outcomes.

How to accomplish branding is an important question, a delegate said. The library field is about information itself, the nature and environment of which have changed as a result of technology, the Internet, interoperability, etc. The challenge is to change people’s perceptions about libraries. One way is to group together all kinds of IM activities, including records, books, and the Internet, and make them available at libraries. However, another participant cautioned that expectations of what librarians and libraries can do must be realistic. Taking on the whole realm of IM would mean much greater involvement in terms of IM policy.

A participant stated that records management, IT, and LS are three separate disciplines. As the environment changes, these disciplines must adapt and evolve to respond to the needs of the clients—public servants and the government as a whole—to deliver on their mandates and agendas. The challenge is to position libraries in the suite of disciplines and clients’ needs. But there is a sense that the mediation between clients and services is improving due to the growing knowledge of librarians and people who work with information.

Participants also discussed how libraries can move from a reactive to a proactive role in bridging technology and information. In some situations, LS people are developing the technology itself, such as building websites and constructing Internet services, rather than waiting for technology to be provided to them. Often their work is not known outside their own departments and does not fall within the terms of their job classifications. Participants expressed a strong feeling that this work, and the librarian profession as a whole, needs legitimate recognition.

The delegates then discussed the balance between traditional libraries and virtual libraries. How can they be the best of both worlds, in particular regarding the use of technology? Also, what is the right model for physical space? Working vertically within departments has been the tradition, but how do librarians fit into horizontal teams, often with members spread across the country, that work in a virtual space within the IM world?

Delegates agreed that even if information is virtual, users will still need physical meeting spaces at various times. And regardless of the technological and desktop tools that are available, such as the Internet and email, the key remains content management. The strategic question, then, is how librarians and libraries can play a proactive role in

enabling the transition from an IT perspective to an IM perspective.

Theme 3: Clients

This group was responsible for the following questions:

- Who are the clients?
- What do they want and need?
- What are their expectations?
- In what way are they (or their expectations) changing?
- In what way do clients represent opportunities and threats for federal libraries?

Participants identified two populations as forming the client base. The primary group comprises organizations within the federal Public Service, whether in the National Capital Region or the regions. These clients may be either generalists or specialists. The second group of clients is Canadians at large, who may be served by federal libraries either through online requests or through the libraries themselves.

A delegate noted that the current client expectation is that information will be available 24-7, online, to anyone, anywhere. He referred to Google as the new “Internet benchmark” for accessing information. Furthermore, clients expect information to be “available, understandable, useable, reliable,” and integrated, whether the documentation is published or unpublished, in records or on the web. The distinctions that librarians “hold dear” in the discipline, he concluded, are not necessarily understood by clients.

A second facet of integration delegated mentioned is that library services need to be integrated with program activities, because people expect an agency’s in-house library to offer a “reflection of the mandate and the programming” of the agency itself. Finally, clients expect to have a person with expertise who is able to “mediate” on the information required, i.e., help them locate and understand information sources.

Participants said they felt there was a real opportunity to understand, research, and study who the clients of library services are, how they are changing, and how they will change. Further, librarians need to be part of the business cycle of the organization and not just an administrative service. This would provide them with an opportunity to assist in the creation and manipulation of information, to facilitate its eventual dissemination. Library activities would thus be able to aid programming activities. It was also noted that the opportunity exists for libraries to become more interdisciplinary.

Delegates discussed the importance of libraries determining their strategic orientation, realizing that they cannot serve everyone’s needs equally and recognizing that some clients are more important than others. Included in this concept is the need to focus on “core” business and stakeholders. With respect to this last point, a participant commented that not all clients want the same amount of attention; some want to be autonomous while others want to be assisted.

Pigeon observed that there appeared to be several opportunities for librarians to be part of the creation of information— part of the business cycle—and to work with other disciplines. In response to her question as to whether or not being part of the business cycle was really achievable, participants stated that it would require leadership and innovation. Given the small number of federal librarians, they said they felt it is necessary to focus on where the need is and where one can make a significant difference.

On the topic of identifying client base and its expectations, Pigeon asked the group to consider the implications for libraries and librarians. Delegates indicated that there was a need for additional resources, or the redirection of current resources, to meet client expectations. Some suggested that the problem might be a question of capacity. Referring to client expectations, one participant contended that a good client survey tool was needed to determine what clients want and whether clients and librarians have a shared understanding of the expectations.

On the issue of survey design, Pigeon asked how one determined the right questions to be asked at a high level to elicit meaningful answers. A participant replied that given the dynamic nature of the world, expectations are always changing, making them difficult to meet. Another commented that the closer one is to clients’ business, the easier it is to know the clients’ needs and expectations.

Pigeon stressed the importance of designing the questions such that they not only elicit information but also support the “thinking process.” Participants observed that an information audit would be a good tool to determine where people obtain their information and how library services are tracked. They recommended looking at how the value of information relates to the needs of the clients. Pigeon stressed the need to acknowledge that libraries’ “clientele” is not one big monolith; it can be broken down into parts, which can be examined to determine needs. Participants agreed that the use of the term “clientele” is inclusive, but stated that librarians tend to know the types of users within their own departments.

A delegate referred to a Library of Congress study on information-seeking behaviour—not what information the client wants but how the client wants to obtain the information. She compared a librarian and the Internet to, respectively, a bank teller and an automated banking service. Whereas in the past a teller handled all banking transactions, with the advent of automated service people now generally seek out tellers only if they have a very difficult transaction, lack access to the automated system, or are uncomfortable with the technology. She emphasized the importance of recognizing when a librarian’s services are required and tailoring services and resources around these occasions.

Participants mentioned the need to decide who are *not* clients and then to focus on those who are. They also stressed the necessity of ensuring that the service provided is what is wanted. One participant gave the example of a library that offered a service it believed was desirable and later learned that it was not used by clients. Pigeon stated that, in such circumstances, there was a need to determine the reason the service was not used. Was it because it was not needed or because no one was aware of it?

In response to a question regarding the demand for integration of material, a participant indicated that, although the implications of integration were huge, a bigger concern was the fact that librarians “don’t even know what [they] don’t know” about other disciplines. She stressed the need to move to a common understanding. Pigeon commented that it is possible to change a threat into an opportunity by regarding another discipline not as a competitor preventing development, but as a potential partner who needs to be understood.

One participant observed that while it is a librarian’s responsibility to locate information, it is the responsibility of the originator of the material to ensure that it is made available to the library. She suggested that welcome kits provided to new employees of an agency or department contain a document explaining their responsibilities with respect to the library.

Another delegate recommended clustering libraries along subject lines. These clusters would be able to leverage knowledge and IM. Pigeon described these arrangements as developing partnerships around portfolios to leverage government investment in IT. Such partnerships would involve a horizontality of direction to create knowledge bases. A participant stated that an increased return on investment would be a more identifiable goal.

Theme 4: Libraries and Librarians

This last group was tasked with discussing the following questions:

- What is happening in the world of libraries nationally and internationally?
- What trends, patterns, preoccupations, and innovations are emerging that may indicate a shift (in thinking, approach, role, etc.) for libraries and librarians?
- What challenges *specific to the Public Service of Canada* is the profession facing?

The group began by contrasting the situation in the United States, where library schools are closing due to a lower demand for librarians, to that in Canada, which is considering opening a library school. The discussion linked back to questions about what constitutes a proper education plan, what the proper competencies are, and how it is possible to make the competencies visible and valuable to clients. A participant stated that most of these issues could be either opportunities or threats, depending upon one’s perspective.

The group also discussed “blurred frontiers of information,” looking at this topic from different perspectives, including an international standpoint. There are many different mechanisms available to feed in information, enabling librarians to publicize a library’s very specialized collections across the world and thereby generate a great deal of business. But the issue then arises of dealing with the additional recognition and demand while still serving the core client group.

Another aspect of change participants mentioned is the nature of interactions with clients.

Whereas in the past a librarian may have had to deal with some fifty requests for information each day, now he or she may only have two requests, but they may be questions involving in-depth project work where the client has already exhausted other investigative avenues. These requests are usually resource-intensive and involve finding and synthesizing information. A participant suggested that in such cases the client needs to involve the librarian while the project is being developed, leading to the idea of “embedding” librarians in portfolios.

The youth of today are extremely computer-literate, commented a participant, and are difficult to serve unless the librarian has kept up with developing technology. This client group wants information in all sorts of different ways. Although federal librarians are restricted in their dealings with young people, this could be a huge opportunity if they could break through the restraints.

Group members also mentioned the issue of bilingualism, but did not discuss it in detail. As well, they brought up the difficulty of becoming leaders while still doing their day jobs.

A participant observed that, while youth know how to access information on the computer, they do not necessarily know where to look for the information or have the energy to do so. Another participant said that librarians are, in a sense, information brokers, adding value to projects. Several participants discussed the question of bilingualism, commenting that the Official Languages Act limits access to information, because information cannot be posted unless it is bilingual. Delegates identified a need to modify the legislation to require only the summary and the meta data to be bilingual, with the original language used in the full text itself.

Returning to the issue of education, one participant observed that the Public Service classification standard describes the library jobs of 30 years ago, giving rise to problems with classification. Further, she questioned whether the standard was “elitist” because it excludes individuals who may have training in IM, yet do not have a Masters degree, as well as those who have the necessary skill set but a different type of training. She cautioned against becoming too specialized. Following a comment with respect to education requirements being part of the selection standard, the delegate clarified that it is classification and selection standards that create difficulties. Another participant observed that he did not see it as “elitist” but rather as a box that was difficult to escape from.

Pigeon stated that the issue is a difficult one as it serves to quantify something librarians feel passionate about—their professional identity, what they have worked for. At the same time, librarians are holding a discourse in which they are intellectually questioning the traditional standards. The participant expanded her comments to the effect that she was not questioning the education of librarians, but believed that in the federal government the classification standard can create an exclusive box, one that includes but one that excludes as well. Pigeon noted that opening up that box and really examining it will affect the profession and the way it regards itself.

A delegate stated that the box could be considered an entry-level skill set and asked what skills should be layered on the basic box and over what period of time.

Finally, a participant asked where libraries and librarians fit into the information era, how librarians facilitate the knowledge economy, and, if information is a competitive asset, how do librarians capitalize on it?

Distinctive Competencies

At this point, Pigeon asked the group to consider the “distinctive competencies” of libraries: what makes them profoundly unique and distinct from any other group. In order to be distinctive, she explained, a quality has to be both collective—i.e., belonging to the group as a whole— and difficult to emulate.

Participants commented that a library provides access to external information or research and also brings external research into the organization. It provides access to a variety of information, which is organized and disseminated, from a variety of sources, in both print and non-print format. Following a question concerning the distinction between their work and the work done by IT, participants noted that libraries select their information, which makes their collections authoritative, not random. Libraries also integrate information from a variety of sources, including technology, so that users’ access is facilitated. In addition, a library has a public dimension in that it is a shared resource to which everyone has access.

Another participant referred to the ability of libraries to synthesize information—to reuse knowledge to create new knowledge. Participants also described libraries as being free to users, offering expert help, and providing a physical space for information that they can “hold in their hands.” Libraries anticipate the needs of clients. They may sometimes be the only place where one can admit a lack of knowledge or skill in a particular area.

Some delegates reminded their colleagues that the identified qualities need to be unique, not applicable to other areas, such as records or the Internet. One participant stated that libraries acquire and disseminate information through a network of other libraries—unlike bookstores, for example, which do not sell other bookstores’ products. Although the quality of “quietness” can also be attributed to churches, participants identified the library as a quiet place where one can think and share knowledge. Others referred to comparability among institutions and standards of approach—the fact that one can visit any library and find similar methodologies in place to retrieve information.

Key Elements of a “Vision” for Federal Libraries and Librarians

Pigeon invited the delegates to project themselves into the year 2010 or 2020, in which libraries and librarians in the federal Public Service are recognized as an essential, high-

quality service. She asked them to imagine that the *Maclean's* of the future was writing an article on these revitalized, re-energized, and valued libraries, and asked participants to envisage key elements of the library of the future that would attract the magazine.

One element of the vision participants identified was that the federal libraries will have organized all government information in an accessible database on the World Wide Web. Library work, in this vision, will have moved away from being transaction-based toward being strategic, with a focus on the critical aspects of work: organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing information. All members of the Public Service will have access to all the information tools and resources they require to provide better service. Further, libraries now have clusters by subject matter for acquisition and service provision. There will be one seamless, automated system for the public to use.

Another vision element offered was this: the Prime Minister will recognize the significance of government libraries and librarians, and credit them with better government decision making. Decisions will be more informed and transparent. Participants saw librarians in the vision as partners in developing and designing programs and policies, providing an indispensable value added. The profession would thus have a more central role in program development.

Given the many retirements in government, participants suggested, librarians in the vision will be considered essential players, central resources having competence in research and knowledge generation. They will be key to the creation of the knowledge economy and viewed as core “activators.” The centralization of all electronic resources with equitable access for all government departments will free librarians for more proactive work. Participants noted that libraries would be a true network. They would work together with IT to ensure smooth and complementary services.

A participant commented that in the future there would be one network of federal, provincial, and territorial libraries, not separated according to government departments. Another expressed the view that the government restrictions currently holding back librarians would be lifted, allowing libraries to function more effectively and establish external partnerships.

On the issue of physical space, delegates saw more librarians as part of project teams, with less emphasis on physical collections. In the vision, federal libraries will be the employer of choice for library-school graduates, because they have the technological know-how.

Areas of Strategic Focus to Achieve the “Vision”

Pigeon next asked the group to identify key levers, or big-picture strategies, that could help to realize the key vision elements that had been described. She explained her use of the term “lever” by comparing the vision to a big rock that could not be budged merely by pushing but that required big levers to get it moving. She asked the participants for

ideas about what needs work to set things in motion.

One participant commented that it was necessary to have both quantifiable and qualitative data to ensure that the parties have a reliable picture of libraries/librarians and clients. Another noted that there have to be a method of measuring value—establishing indicators and benchmarks. To be central rather than peripheral, he continued, it is necessary for libraries to be part of the equation going forward. Delegates identified the need to articulate a business model, with the actual indicators forming part of the model.

Participants spoke of the importance of forming alliances and placing IM/librarians within the greater context of information and its relation to support services delivery, policy, and accountability. With respect to human resources, participants identified recruitment, competencies, retention, and classification as issues that required attention. Delegates spoke of the need to organize the community and to deploy technology effectively.

To encourage potential clients to use the service libraries provide, Pigeon recommended the identification of the audience. It is important to know who the client is in order to make a strong business case with a communication strategy and a marketing plan. All these must be tied together and anchored in a clear vision of what one wants to achieve. Participants noted the need for committed and accountable leadership and a shared vision to organize the community.

Next Steps

Pigeon asked the group to identify some very practical next steps—things that had to happen over the next few months to get on track to reach the vision. Delegates expressed the need to create a project team in the library community to think through the steps more thoroughly. The team would have to coalesce around an objective or a project charter and would have to define the project and develop a work plan.

In response to a question about the role of the CFL in these endeavours, some participants indicated that the CFL, especially the Planning and Priorities Committee, could form the project team. Others commented that LAC could provide the funding. Delegates expressed a hope that the forum would give rise to a white paper, resulting in a plan of action.

Wrap-up

Marilyn Osborne

A substantive report on the forum, Osborne said, would be forthcoming. Following that, staff would draft a white paper that consolidates the issues and recommended projects. She noted that LAC, through its legislated responsibility, has accepted the role of project manager. Because, however, there are no dedicated resources for the project, a great deal

of internal work was required that would benefit from the group’s assistance. She acknowledged that the project could not be dealt with by CFL or LAC alone, but would require cooperation from various partners. Much of the initial work, she said, would be accomplished through the use of volunteer resources.

Osborne expressed her belief that the vision as articulated during the forum was reasonable and realistic, but that it would require a great deal of work to achieve. She said that it would be necessary to scope the vision as short term / long term, and to validate it. The library community, Osborne said, lacked the resources to accomplish this on its own, but she said she was uncertain as to where the responsibility for validation should rest.

The issue needs to be taken to the LAC Management Board, said Osborne, because if it is to become part of the short-term plan it will be necessary to scope out resources and get approval. With records management, archiving, and libraries as the three foundation elements of IM, the project would be an IM initiative. Achieving the vision might be difficult, requiring energy, resources, and efforts, she said, but it is possible. She called the scenario conjured up by delegates “a good vision, an exciting vision,” ambitious, but not unrealistic.