

Report to the Nunavut Library Association on the Summer 2016 Retreat of The Partnership

Toronto, August 16-17, 2016

Submitted by Carol Rigby

I attended the 2016 summer retreat of The Partnership as the representative of the Nunavut Library Association. This year, all associations were represented except BCLA. The meeting was chaired by Su Cleyle. Most associations were represented by executive members, except Nunavut and Yukon, who were represented by members able to make the trip within the budget provided. Travel expenses (to a certain limit) and hotel accommodation were covered by the Ontario Library Association (OLA), who hosted the meeting.

The retreat started on Tuesday morning with the usual roundtable environmental scan. Each association was asked to describe their membership, provide a couple of examples of their association's successes and a couple of their challenges. Association membership numbers range from around a dozen (in the territories) to OLA at 5500+ members. In all, The Partnership represents around 7700 members of provincial and territorial associations.

Some associations had more notable challenges than others, e.g. NLLA, who were extremely busy with advocacy protesting the cuts to public library services in Newfoundland & Labrador. They expressed thanks for the support received from Partnership members in their efforts to communicate with the NL government. At the time of reporting, the government had suspended the cuts and was to conduct further studies on the possible impacts of these closures.

Among the northern associations, NWTLA has about a dozen members. They do active fund-raising for charitable causes such as sponsoring donations of books to schools that are matched by Scholastic. They still have challenges accessing Education Institute (EI) offerings due to connectivity issues, and are trying to stabilize their membership, as they have a high turnover rate in library staff in the NWT (short-term employment & people moving on). The Yukon association reports that they have up to 35 members now, and are doing well in Whitehorse, but there is a big divide between them and rural library staff; a challenge is to break down that barrier. They now have a full executive but still a very informal structure, e.g. no AGM. Strong interest in participating in CFLA was expressed.

For our association, I reported around 16 members resident in Nunavut plus half-a-dozen outside Nunavut who work with Nunavut libraries or residents or with Inuit. I reported as a "success" that we are managing to hang together and support each other, despite very little opportunity to meet in person, and that we form an essential professional network for each other. I indicated our challenges were filling the very large hole left by Yvonne Earle's retirement, and trying to create interest in and support for membership to keep the connections going. We also would like to participate in creating EI offerings, but most of our members are extremely time-challenged given the very small nature of our libraries. Telecommunications and connectivity are always an issue for us with our limited satellite bandwidth.

The roundtable was synopsized by Su as follows:

Successes:

- Advocacy seems to be working well at all levels

- Regional partnerships are forming; groups are talking with other associations within their provinces/territories and regions, and with other groups (e.g. trustees and library technician associations)
- Conferences are still big for bringing memberships together, but these need to be agile and adaptable
- Consolidating associations: amalgamations, bridging, partnerships in member benefits (e.g. Manitoba moving towards one umbrella library association, along the model of OLA)
- Governance: associations engaging in board training, empowerment, insurance (for liability), codes of conduct
- Viability: most associations are viable, not broke financially

Challenges:

- Advocacy: the fact that it's still needed (e.g. in NL); the need for media training to be more effective; the need for a national body (now looking like CFLA) still in terms of support, toolkits, especially for national issues
- Succession planning: how to engage members to participate and serve on the executive, and how to avoid volunteer fatigue
- Library trustees (in the provincial library sector) and how to connect with and include them
- Membership numbers: a few associations are down a bit, need for engagement; a bigger problem for the smaller associations.
- CFLA: what is it going to mean, how do we participate? An unknown. Financial impact also unknown

What's missing?

- New ideas for revenue generation
- Need to look at membership structures; is there value around consistency? A similar approach for all associations is difficult due to variable populations
- We all need to make an effort to identify a value statement, that answers the key question, "What are the benefits of being a member of our association?"
- Enticements to join the executive boards of associations (e.g. training, certification in governance or advocacy, etc.)
- Metrics and solid information about the void left by the dissolution of CLA: e.g. job postings, exhibitor \$\$ for conferences, orphan members who longer pay CLA dues but may not have membership in another association
- Figuring out how to host CFLA as a national summit or policy forum; relationship with CFLA still to evolve

What's next?

- For the associations:
 - outreach for CLA orphans
 - affirmation of the value of association
 - sharing ideas of something that worked with other associations
- For The Partnership:
 - Promoting the value of collective discussions at the retreats
 - Promoting the value of participating in the Partnership and being on the executive
 - Being better at communications for the group
 - Streaming EI courses into certificate programs
 - Providing executive training, e.g. in grant writing

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Member associations were asked to come to the winter retreat (2017 OLA Super Conference) with a value statement to share
2. Also asked to share an idea of something that worked and would be replicable for others at the next roundtable session.

During the lunch break, the three representatives of the territorial associations (Mairi MacRae, YLA rep; Louise Boettger, NWTLA Treasurer, and Carol Rigby, NLA rep) discussed what we knew about the participation of the territories in CFLA and its proposed structure, which came down to “not much.” Yukon has been in on the discussion of the governance structure, but would like to see the whole north included. We discussed what we see as some of the challenges for our participation:

- 2 of the 3 associations don't have fee-paying members currently
- Fees, where they exist (NWT), are minimal (\$20/year)
- Willingness to pay fees or an increased fee is highly variable (fees are considered a barrier in Nunavut, NWT members not likely willing to pay more than they do)
- We have low numbers but good representation of our sector (i.e. working from a much smaller population base)
- A regional association doesn't exist and isn't really practical, given the distances involved and the markedly different cultures, landscapes and infrastructure available (e.g. different aboriginal culture groups, no highway system in Nunavut)
- We collectively have something important to offer to the national library conversation; how can CFLA encourage us and make it possible for us to participate?
 - We represent a huge land mass of Canada
 - We represent a strong indigenous/aboriginal voice and many cultures
 - We provide a real northern voice and perspective on national issues
- We face inequality of access to national programs and advocacy efforts if there is a barrier for the North

After lunch, Shelagh Paterson (Executive Director, OLA) gave an update on the 2017 Super Conference and invited The Partnership to the annual Winter Retreat held just before the conference begins.

A discussion was then held about the logistics of trying to host a CFLA policy summit with an existing provincial association conference. LAA had concerns about being asked to hold the first one, when they were already well into the planning cycle of their conference. It became evident that there was some confusion in the communications between the new CFLA board and the provincial associations as to when and how the first CFLA forum or summit would be held. It was agreed that the member associations would support LAA in their concern that sufficient planning time be allocated for starting up CFLA summits, and that the framework of things that have to be considered in the logistics of partnering would be brought up during the second day of the meeting when CFLA would be on the agenda.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent at the Incentive Works Conference exhibitor displays at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, as a professional development opportunity for all those associations that hold conferences and would be interested in the latest developments in conference planning and supply logistics. Although very interesting, few of the offerings were of much relevance to NLA—unless we'd like to hold our very first conference at some nice warm exotic resort, perhaps?

Day 2 of the retreat opened with a motion from LAA that Su Cleyle be reappointed for another term as chair of The Partnership. I seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. The morning then covered much of the usual business reporting of The Partnership:

- Partnership Journal: Editor Robin Bergart presented the preliminary results of a survey of Partnership readers trying to determine where the journal fits in the library journal landscape. As she is planning to write an academic paper on the results, we were asked not to distribute her presentation generally. Among the highlights:
 - the most value for the journal was seen to be in its Canadian content and the fact that it is open source
 - there was a real tug-of-war between its academic readers, who valued that it was peer-reviewed, versus “professional” content.
 - The title of the journal doesn’t really grab readers or say much; but it is now established in open-access databases, so changing the name would risk losing whatever profile it has established over the last 10 years
 - They have drawn up a code of ethics for the journal, and it identifies The Partnership executive as the final board of arbitration for unresolved disputes. She wanted confirmation that this was OK, and a motion was passed for provisional acceptance of responsibility for appeals. The statement of the code of ethics is posted on the journal’s website.
- The Job Board: a report was distributed with the meeting package, as it is run through BCLA and they were unable to attend. With CLA gone, it is now the premier place in Canada for posting library positions.
- EI/CEC: New staff member at OLA Mary-Rose O’Connor reviewed the current promotional program for EI offerings.
 - we were all asked to add her to our contact lists to ensure the promotions can get pushed out to association members. This has since been done by NLA and Leigh Ann passes the messages along to our list.
 - There was discussion about retroactive posting and how to promote webinars that have already happened
 - The question of grouping webinars into possible certificate streams was brought up. Mary-Rose already does some thematic batching for promotions, so will look into this possibility
 - Lou Duggan indicated that a new representative from the public library sector was needed on the EI Committee
 - Continuing Education Certificate (CEC) administrators indicated there wasn’t a lot of new activity, and that they are waiting for a new formal communication plan to help in promotion, especially for institutions
- Suzanne Wice from OLA presented their Library Marketplace, as a source for library-branded promotional materials that can be used for fundraising, conference swag, etc., as well as OLA’s selection of professional resources.
 - OLA was in the process of taking over officially from CLA as the distributor of ALA materials in Canada (official announcement followed in September)
 - They have been developing easy options for associations to have generic library branded items for sale at conferences; I have more information on their “store in a box” program (used successfully by ABQLA)
 - They can provide quotes at discount prices on association branded items as well. I have more information via e-mail but wanted to gauge interest before forwarding.

Discussion then took place regarding the general governance structure of the Partnership and some of its committees, due to some people leaving.

- There is a perception that Partnership services may be stalled or languishing due to a lack of effective communications
- It was moved and passed that Lou Duggan be reappointed as Secretary for the Partnership, and appointed as Chair of the Communication Committee
- CEC no longer requires representation on the Education Committee
- Priorities for the Communication Committee were identified as follows:
 - Information on the benefits of membership
 - Website audits for member associations to ensure Partnership coverage, and information sent out so that people can keep sites up to date
 - Promotion of CEC and EI institutional memberships

The remainder of the meeting was spent with representatives from the new CFLA board and their “Senior Project Executive,” Kevin Brennan. Separate report to follow.