Report to the Nunavut Library Association, October Meeting, 2012

Progress report: Maintaining the NLA Website

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Current Situation:

The Nunavut Library Association currently has a very basic website developed and hosted at no charge by the National Adult Literacy Database, based in New Brunswick: www.nunavutlibraryassociation.ca

Concerns were expressed at the last NLA meeting about the fact that funding for NALD had been cut, and it looked like they might no longer be able to provide this service. Options were discussed for moving the website or developing an alternative, preferably at no cost since the NLA has no formal financial structure.

Tina Rose suggest considering WordPress as a content management system (CMS), which she currently uses for a personal blog, and noted it is also possible to maintain a free blog or website hosted on WordPress.com. Members expressed interest in the idea, and since that meeting, Tina has developed a parallel version of the NLA website hosted at WordPress, http://nunavutlibraryassociation.wordpress.com/.

Since then, Carol Rigby has worked with Tina on updating and developing the test WordPress-based website, which was sent out to the NLA list for review before this meeting to consider some of the options available.

This report summarizes the various issues involved in maintaining and possibly moving the existing website to the new format, so that the NLA can decide on an appropriate course of action.

Current Website Issues

Our current website is hosted by NALD, which used to offer free website hosting and design service for non-profit organizations supporting literacy promotion. However, we now have several issues with this arrangement:

- The website is difficult to update and maintain. We have correspondence relating to service issues going back to 2008; the chief problem is that is it difficult for anyone in Nunavut to upload material to the site directly, as the connection to the server in NB is frequently poor, and transmitting material to someone local there to upload doesn't work much better.
- Ken Su of NPLS used to be our webmaster and contact person for communications between NALD and the NLA; he is no longer working in Nunavut.
- Perhaps most importantly, NALD recently sent out correspondence indicating that due to budget cuts, they can continue to host websites but will no longer be able to offer website maintenance: "Your organization will now be responsible for updating and maintaining your website" (Bill Stirling, CEO, NALD; personal communication, Oct. 18, 2012).

Since we have trouble accessing their server, it looks like we will need to move the website in order to be able to maintain it in any case.

We have our own domain name, www.nunavutlibraryassociation.ca, paid for by the Nunavut Literacy Council (thanks Kim!), currently valid until Nov. 21, 2015, at which point it could be renewed. This name is ours, no matter where our website is hosted, if we wish to use it.

Moving to WordPress as a CMS

At the last meeting, Tina was tasked with investigating a switch to WordPress as a CMS and possible host. She set up a sample WordPress website, and Carol offered to assist with content. Carol also determined at the August Partnership meeting in Toronto that other associations are switching to WordPress, notably the Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association, and they find it very user-friendly. It is also used by a number of CLA Networks as a member communication vehicle.

We have developed a fairly extensive alternative version of the website, currently at a free WordPress location: http://nunavutlibraryassociation.wordpress.com/ This is not linked to our domain name at present, so they remain two separate entities. This link was sent around to NLA members for consideration on Oct. 26.

Some features of the "new" website:
- We tried to maintain a similar look and feel to the current website with the banner, layout and logo, while reorganizing it to be more user-friendly and up-to-date (not too much information per page, more nesting of pages and hyperlinking)
- It can be maintained as a standard static front page website, with nested pages, but also has a blogging function; currently we have established one blog category, for Events and Activities, to which current newsy items can be easily posted (there are currently 3 samples). It is possible to add other blog categories, split the current one into NLA events and Member Activities, etc.; this is a design option that could be discussed. We could add a photo gallery category to the blog if people wanted to share photos, as well.
- If people are interested in social media links, widgets can be added easily for Facebook, Twitter, etc.; it's a very flexible environment with lots of options ready-made.

A lot of new material has been added in the reorganization:
- Some new main pages have been added
  - For The Partnership, to "push out" their programs and materials as requested, in return for their support of our participation
  - For Advocacy, since that seems to be the main activity we engage in; this section could be used to post copies of letters we've sent, national campaigns such as the CLA advocacy toolkits on various topics, etc.
  - For Publications, with the former pages for Newsletter & Meeting Minutes nested under it.
- Some new sub-pages have been added:
  - For member publications and presentations, under the Publications page, so we can share materials (e.g. posted Carol's presentation to CLA on Inuktitut & multilingual bibliographic cataloguing standards developed by Nunavut libraries)
  - The "about us" main page was reduced to the mission statement, to make it punchier, and the organization information was moved to a separate sub-page
  - A new page was added for "our libraries" as a place where we could highlight the work of individual members; this could be further subdivided, to make it shorter and snappier, so there is a sub-page under that for the Legislative Library as an example. This area could be used for all the different library systems and organization to tout their services, give links to their individual web-pages, etc.

The issue of language might need to be considered; WordPress offers interfaces in a number of languages, such as French, but Inuktitut is not among them. However, if we wanted to have some Inuktitut content within individual pages, the software is Unicode-compliant and syllabics do appear properly when typed into the pages. We currently have no material in any language other than English.

There's lots of fine-tuning to be done, but if members like the general look and feel, a committee could be struck to review new developments. Tina has asked Carol to take over role of Webmaster, since she is no longer in the NWMB library as her primary position, but she is willing to stay on and offer technical support (which Carol thinks would be especially helpful in the case of incorporating social media, should members want to move in that direction).

Moving to WordPress as a Host

WordPress is a CMS, but also offers hosting services. These are free if listed under WordPress.com, and not exceeding a certain size (well within what we would be using). They also offer a hosting service that will link to a registered individual domain name, such as our nunavutlibraryassociation.ca, at a cost of $18/year.

There appear to be no issues with accessing the host to add new content, upload files or photos, etc. This has been done from locations in Ontario and Nunavut, without any problems (other than figuring out how to do it!)

Technically, there is no need to "migrate" the old website, if the new design is preferred, since it uses a completely different web format; we could simply thank NALD for their services, make sure they are credited for the development of our banner (until such time as we decide to re-design it, if ever), and dump the old site.

One outstanding technical issue is where the current info@nunavutlibraryassociation.ca webmail address goes to. We might need to redirect it, or shift to the temporary g-mail account Tina set up for the test website.

Options for Members to Consider:

1. Keep our current website on the NALD server, and try to figure out how to run it.
    a. This option is not recommended due to the server access issues.
    b. Chief advantage: no cost.
2. Move to a free WordPress-hosted website: essentially the new website as it is now.
    a. Pro: no cost.
    b. Con: we would lose our unique domain name, which is already paid for.
3. Move to a WordPress-hosted website, and pay WordPress the $18 yearly fee to have our own domain name used.
    a. Pro: we would keep our current identity, with WordPress flexibility and easy access
    b. Con: we would have to figure out the logistics of paying the $18/year fee, since the Association doesn't do money. Possible options: use Partnership royalties; get donations from individual members