

Update on CFLA to NLA November 2016

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At the 2016 summer retreat of The Partnership, the final afternoon was spent in conversation between the Partnership members and representatives of the new Canadian Federation of Library Associations (Donna Bourne-Tyson, Chair; Paul Takala, Past Chair; Kevin Brennan, Senior Project Executive). They provided information about the role and structure of CFLA, and then a number of matters of concern were discussed. Copies of information provided by the CFLA reps are attached, including information about the current activities and initiatives they are taking on.

Background

In 2016, the Canadian Library Association was dissolved. It was seen by many in the Canadian library association landscape to be redundant or in competition with other provincial and sectoral library associations, and a majority of the membership voted to close it down. However, there was still perceived to be a need for a national group to work on the national advocacy and policy fronts, and it was felt that a new body constituting a federation of Canadian library associations, in the manner of IFLA, would meet this need. This new federation is still in the process of development and is refining its structure, governance and membership rules.

A key difference between CFLA and the old CLA is that the new federation is open strictly to association membership; individuals are not allowed to be members of this association. Individuals participate in the work and programs of this new association by being members of a member association.

In practical terms, this means each association has to pay the membership fee as an association. For an association to be a member, and for individuals within that association to participate, the association has to be in a position to pay the membership fee.

The governance structure is still being refined, but at present, voting privileges within CFLA are based on the level of fees paid. Member associations can have one to three votes:

- 1 vote \$300-\$2,000
- 2 votes \$2,001-\$10,000
- 3 votes >\$10,001 to a maximum of \$60,000

It is not quite clear how the actual membership fee is negotiated (e.g. whether it is based on association size).

The executive board of CFLA is currently composed as follows:

- 9-12 board members in total
- 7 members who each are executive board members of a “multi-sector provincial association” from the following regions (i.e. Partnership members):

- BC
- AB
- Prairie Provinces (SK, MB)
- Central Canada (ON)
- Quebec
- Atlantic Canada (NB, NS, PEI, NL)
- Northern Territories (YK, NWT, NU)
- 1 member from a francophone library association (i.e. in addition to Quebec)
- 1 member of indigenous ancestry (First Nation, Metis, Inuit)
- 1 member from CARL (Canadian Association of Research Libraries)
- 1 member from CULC (Canadian Urban Libraries Council)

The Board appoints its officers from among its members. A process was also described for how the Board members are nominated and elected. This governance structure was decided on to get the federation up and running, but could require further refinement. They will be putting out a call for nominations in the fall, and it will be up to the various members involved as to how they want to put people up for nomination (e.g. who in OLA would be their rep? How would it be decided which provincial/territorial association gets to be the rep for “regions” involving more than one association?)

Discussion

There was considerable discussion around the governance topic. In particular, the representatives of the three territorial associations tried to explain how this particular governance structure raises significant barriers to our membership. We had discussed the matter the previous day over lunch, coming up with the following observations:

- 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 in formal terms, 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

It was difficult to convey to the group how this current governance model is a challenge for the northern associations not just as a financial issue, but as a structural one. The formal, fee-based membership structure of most southern library associations is so ingrained that they find it difficult to understand how we are an “association” when we don’t collect dues, etc.; whereas for us (Nunavut and YK in particular, but even the NWT fees are purely nominal by other association standards), it’s the ability to communicate with each other, share challenges and experiences and provide mutual support and advice that are most important. Participation in the Partnership is particularly valuable for us as keeps us linked into the Canadian library landscape through the other provincial associations and gives us access to the professional development available through the Partnership.

When they suggested we “consolidate” our memberships into one regional group, we also had to explain how different our territories are in terms of their people, culture and infrastructure, and how extreme our communications challenges are (lack of bandwidth, satellite communications only, etc.). It is difficult enough to get our people together within a single territory, never mind among different territories (quoting a few airline fares helps to bring that point home).

Although Sarah Gallagher from YLA had been a “northern” representative in the initial discussions setting up the governance framework, I had to explain how one person being missing in our structure (Yvonne’s retirement) meant a key communication went missing for a while so NLA, for example, really missed out on being part of the discussion in the later stages of setting up CFLA formally.

It was determined that the Senior Project Executive (their name for, basically, an executive director) Kevin Brennan would set up a teleconference among the three northern associations and CFLA to discuss these challenges in further detail:

- Structure of membership
- Costs
- Mechanisms for CFLA board appointments

I agreed to represent NLA in such discussions, contingent on that being confirmed by our whole group, which was done by e-mail later in September. However, in that process, a number of reservations were brought up, so I have agreed at this point to sit in on the conversation and participate in the discussion, but not to agree to or promise any kind of formal participation by NLA under the current structure.

The northern associations’ teleconference with CFLA executive is currently slated to take place Monday Nov. 21.

Conclusions/next steps:

Interest in participating in CFLA and its national initiatives varies among the three northern associations:

- NWT is interested and does have funds to be able to pay a very basic membership fee (again, how that fee is calculated isn’t entirely clear) and become a member of CFLA.
- YLA members are interested but, like us, do not currently have a formally constituted structure; there is apparently some talk of establishing a membership fee for YLA that will generate

enough revenue to cover a CFLA membership (maybe a bit of the cart driving the horse—or sled pulling the dog?).

- NLA has members who are keen on participating in programs and issues of national interest, but have strong reservations about changing the essential nature of our association simply to accommodate a federation fee. Therefore, unless NLA members choose to pay dues to some other member association, they are currently supposed to be ineligible to participate in CFLA initiatives. However, NLA members have already been recruited for a CFLA initiative (the TRC response committee) so there is some discrepancy there.

Another matter is how we would decide to nominate or appoint members from our region to the designated northern seat on the CFLA board. We would need to decide that amongst the three associations. The president of the Saskatchewan LA kindly gave me some documents outlining how the “prairie provinces” have decided to go about the process (basically agreeing to take turns, but with a due process for selecting the individual in question from the association for the appointed year), should that be a concern for us down the road.

Key questions:

- Is it time or do we want to constitute NLA formally as a registered society so that we can collect fees or create other revenues?
- If we do that, do we actually want to participate in CFLA?
- Would it be better to sit back and observe, and let the other two northern associations represent “the North” on the CFLA Board before we decide if its activities are significant enough for us to need to be able to participate?
- Should we be looking at some way to maintain regular discussions and coordination with the other territorial organizations, regardless of whether we are members of CFLA or not?
- Is there any particular important message I need to convey to the other participants in the conference call?

Handout from CFLA from meeting scanned in attached PDF.