

Policy as A Commitment to First Nations Collection

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Although 2013 Super Conference has come and gone and the planners are already well into the 2014 work, there is one session worthy of a bit more visitation. Some of you may have attended the Aboriginal Stream Super Saturday Session at the OLA Super

Conference where Policy as Commitment to First Nations Collection Development was discussed. As we move into another fiscal year, which for many may be the last year of the term before the next municipal election, you may be considering what lasting impacts you can leave for your Library. For those of you who missed out on the discussions at this round table, it is hoped that you will consider this article in your fiscal and strategic planning for the year.

As a First Nation public library or a library located in proximity to a Reserve, this seems a natural step. For those of you not in these situations, there are still very strong reasons to consider these actions as well. To begin, Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Ontario, at nearly four times the Canadian birthrate. As a result, all public libraries are experiencing growing demands to provide service for Aboriginal patrons. Second, of the nearly 300,000 Aboriginal peoples in Ontario, 80% live off-Reserve. That means they reside, work, and participate in library services in your community! (Yes in your community.) Further, as a multicultural and inclusive library, all Boards should be invested in special populations' needs and the educational capacity of all Ontarians through service, professional development, and collection policy development.

So how can a Board best serve the general Ontarian needing Aboriginal content, as well as the Aboriginal resident? The answer is what Boards do best - policy and governance. Policy is a commitment to act, and act we must. The Six Nations Public Library Board has developed a five step plan to succeed in this area and we invite you to join the OLPA, FOPL, and many Boards who have formed policy around commitment to Aboriginal content. Our five step approach includes:

1. Build collections which will serve the Aboriginal population AND the general users.
2. Identify the local territory of your Library and add

Native content to the local collection relevant to the people of that territory.

3. Offer programs that will grow Canadian citizenship including those of Aboriginal topics (e.g. speaker/author series).
4. Create policy which will list all/any of these as priorities of the Board.
5. Represent these Policy Priorities in Plans.

Feedback by those who participated in Super Conference round tables pertaining to the Policy as Commitment and the five step plan is that it is both simple and doable; however, that it is not the Board's role to build collections. As a CEO, I completely agree with this statement, but must also argue, that without the Board's support, prioritization, creation of policy, and ultimate fund allocation, the CEO is limited in any special collection development. With shrinking budgets, it is extremely difficult for any CEO or department head to purchase everything that is required or of interest. Not that the Board should be selecting the actual materials, but when policy and plans mandate a priority, the collections and staff PD is clearly rationalized and can follow.

Since policy development is one of the prime responsibilities of the Board, we can accept the premise for Policy as Commitment and draft the policy. This Policy then informs the Plans. Plans receive Allocations (funding priority). Allocations in turn develop collections and staff. So in short, yes, Policy is Commitment to First Nations Collection Development.

So if you were to draft an Aboriginal Collections Policy



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Policy as Commitment

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or Local Collections Policy, what should be included? Although an example can be found online at the Super Conference Super Saturday site (session #1706), it is suggested that you begin with a Preamble which describes why the policy is deemed of significance to the Board. Next would be a statement on Local History, local content, and the nations which could be considered local. A section on Language Materials including the official languages and those of the local/territorial Aboriginal community may also be of interest, if supported by research that states a population is interested in its use. Most definitely we suggest a Selection Criteria section which includes need to provide accurate information within the materials, as well as content supported by or authored by recognized sources.

The First Nation Communities Read short lists are a great way to build content which is both authored/illustrated by Aboriginal people and supported by or authorized by communities. In the selection criteria or as a separate section you may also want to include a statement on Vendor of Record. Many Libraries have established Vendors of Record for collections, but these may not have strong Aboriginal content, and rarely have experts to assist in purchasing decisions. As such, consider a separate Vendor of Record such as GoodMinds.com, the Vendor of Record for Aboriginal materials during the Ministry's \$15 Million Grant, and the official vendor for the First Nation Communities Read program. This vendor has professional staff that can assist with collection development needs and can discuss authority and quality of materials.

Finally, I would suggest a section on Professional Development and Partnerships. It is important not to forget the staff when development is concerned. All the materials in the world won't be properly accessed if informed decisions do not occur pertaining to readers' advisory, programming, and collection planning by staff. Further, through partnerships, communities may find that they can access the knowledge of local communities or even create a sister community partnership with a more remote community.

Although this article is intended to provide a clear direction for Commitment to First Nations Collection Development, a Board may consider the 5 step process for developing any special collections. Alternate language materials, local history, popular local activities, or even francophone collections can be developed in this manner. Simply stated, the Board determines a priority by authoring a policy; policy then informs strategic planning

documents and other plans; areas within the plans receive first or guaranteed allocations in annual budgets; and those allocations are used in collection development and training staff. As we like to say at our Library every policy season—happy drafting!

(Six Nations Public Library is an OPLG Accredited library; the only public library located on First Nation Territory with an independent library board; and the only provincial library with a Commitment to First Nations Collection Development Policy.)

