

# MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL: PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN CANADA

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*Joint use school and public libraries have a long history in Canada and, particularly in rural Canada, many of these relationships continue. The landscape for public and academic libraries is significantly different. There are 70 university, just over 200 college and technical institute, and over 3000 public libraries in Canada, yet few joint use academic and public libraries exist. This does not reflect a reluctance among academic and public libraries to work together, however. While actual joint use might not be common, there are many examples of mutually beneficial partnerships between public and academic libraries. This paper provides an overview of the diversity of public-academic library partnerships that can be found across Canada, before focusing on Canadian examples of joint use libraries – unique partnerships created in response to an expressed need.*

...our libraries are not being merged; rather they are being married. In a merger someone loses. In a good marriage, both partners retain their own personalities while at the same time supporting and enriching each other's lives. This vision also well incorporates the commitment that the whole will equal more than the sum of the two parts. We do not want to settle for whatever service is the better of the two existing practices. We want to forge a partnership that will allow us to offer more and better than what either of us is currently doing.<sup>1</sup>

**P**artnerships are mutually beneficial, enriching the lives of those participating in the partnership and, in the case of partnerships between libraries, also enriching the lives or experiences of those using and staffing the libraries. Partnerships embody mutual respect and commitment; they are ineffective if either partner is not interested in making the partnership work.<sup>2</sup>

## **School and public libraries**

Partnerships between school and public libraries have a long history in Canada. As public libraries were established in small towns throughout the country, many of them colocated with the school library, providing services to school children and the general public from the same physical space. This situation continues today, particularly in rural Canada, with joint use school and public libraries providing service to their user communities in a variety of ways. There are often very strong connections between school and public libraries that are not colocated as well, as they share programming and work together in supporting student learning.<sup>3</sup>

## **Academic and public libraries**

The Canadian landscape of partnerships between public and academic libraries is significantly different. There are 70 university, just over 200 colleges and technical institutes, and over 3000 public libraries in Canada,<sup>4</sup> yet examples of partnerships between individual academic and public libraries are not readily apparent. This seems an odd contrast to the many public-school library partnerships. Are there really few partnerships between academic libraries and public libraries or are the partnerships simply not well documented? To get a sense of the current level of partnerships between academic and public libraries in Canada some research needed to be done. With a knowledge of current partnerships and partnership options, along with an understanding of how partnerships are sustained, public and academic libraries can discover ways to increase the depth and breadth of services to their clients.

## **The survey**

An initial literature review resulted in information on less than 10 examples of current partnerships. Further research was clearly necessary. With publicly available information difficult to find, the most effective method of gathering information appeared to be direct communication with the libraries. An emailed set of questions was sent to public, not for profit, academic libraries, including religious institutions and collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (Cegeps) across Canada; for profit postsecondary institutions were not included. The decision to send the questions to academic libraries rather than public libraries was based solely on numbers – as noted earlier, there are fewer than 300 academic libraries in Canada in contrast to over 3000 public libraries.

The names of Canadian academic libraries were obtained from the college & university libraries section of the 25th edition (2010-2011) of *Libraries Canada/Bibliothèques Canada* published by Grey House Publishing. Each institution was entered into an Excel spreadsheet organized by province/ territory with the name of the institution, the library director's name and email address, and the library's website address. The names of the directors were checked against their library's website as listed in the directory. If the web address was incorrect then a search was done to find the correct address.

A letter introducing the study and containing the key research questions was sent to library directors in the form of an email. For libraries in the province of Quebec the letter was translated into French by a certified translator. The salutation was changed for each letter to make the request more personal. All emails were sent from one of the researchers' email so that responses and questions would come directly to the researcher. As the responses were received they were checked off a master list generated from the Excel document. This allowed for responses to be tracked by province and ensured that follow up messages would not be sent to those who had already responded.

The survey was sent out on 22 August 2011 with a deadline date of 2 September. Although this time period, at the end of summer, may have impacted the response rate due to holidays or the start of the new term, it was felt that this timing was better than earlier in the summer period or later into the first month of classes. Reminder notices were sent three days prior to the end date to those who had not yet responded.

The survey was initially sent to 271 libraries in the ten provinces and three territories of Canada. Four of those were to the same librarian who looks after four libraries. Unfortunately, contact could not be made with 22 libraries despite numerous attempts by email and by telephone; 21 of those were in Quebec (including four campuses of the Université du Québec and a number of Cegeps) and the other was the college in Nunavut. In the end only 249 libraries were successfully contacted.

In total, 449 emails were sent. The survey was resent to 178 libraries for a variety of reasons: the first contact person had changed positions or retired, the email address had been changed, or the initial contact person directed the survey to an alternate. Reminder emails were sent to those who had not responded by 31 August.

<b>Survey responses</b>		
Alberta	19/38	= 50%
British Columbia	19/34	= 56%
Manitoba	6/12	= 50%
New Brunswick	4/9	= 44%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1/2	= 50%
Northwest Territories	1/3	= 33%
Nova Scotia	5/13	= 38%
Ontario	27/59	= 46%
Prince Edward Island	0/3	= 0%
Quebec	16/61	= 26%
Saskatchewan	11/14	= 79%
Yukon Territory	0/1	= 0%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>109/249</b>	<b>= 44%</b>

One hundred and nine of the 249 libraries responded to the email, resulting in a response rate of 44%. Following the end date of the survey a website check and an internet search was done for the nonresponding libraries to explore the possibility that partnerships might be highlighted on individual library websites. This resulted in an additional six examples of academic-public library partnerships.

### **Survey outcomes**

Drawing from the email survey results, in conjunction with information gathered from the literature and from individual library websites, a sense of the variety of partnerships between public and academic libraries in Canada appears. These partnerships are wide ranging: province wide and regional consortia for reciprocal borrowing, purchasing of resources, provision of virtual reference, shared catalogues, and shared library management systems; one time and recurring shared programming opportunities; shared

collection development; the location of public library collections in academic libraries; academic library collections in public libraries; and joint use libraries.

Consortial partnerships were by far the most common form of partnership between academic and public libraries. Province wide consortia exist in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Many academic libraries in those provinces participate in their provincial consortium. Thus partnering with public libraries is tangential, occurring through both libraries' membership in the larger group. A few regional consortia primarily focusing on reciprocal borrowing, shared catalogues, and/or shared library management systems can be found in Ontario and Quebec. These involve more direct interactions between academic and public libraries.

Of the respondents, six spoke of partnering with a public library in programming; some have partnered in one off programs on multiple occasions and others run shared recurring programs. In a few cases libraries have located collections in partner libraries – these are either public library collections in academic libraries or academic library collections in public libraries. Additional shared collections occur through digitization initiatives. Four libraries highlighted current or recent digitization projects shared between public and academic libraries. In addition, in a number of provinces digitization initiatives are handled within a province wide consortium.

Interestingly, many of the libraries that are partnering in regional consortia and programming appear to be partnering in more than one way, implying a sense of comfort with the general idea of using partnerships to provide a service or find a solution to an emerging need. Examples of multiple partnerships were often between the same two libraries. This can be interpreted as showing that a positive partnership experience can help develop a stronger relationship between two libraries and improve the likelihood of future partnerships.

One example also surfaced of a partnership between a city, its public library, and the local college. An agreement between the three partners involved financial support from the city for a new college library in exchange for the college library acting as the research branch of the public library system. For the college the goal of the partnership was to help the community see the college library as a resource for them. Initially the college and public libraries met biannually to review operations, the college library contributed to the public library's annual report, and there was interbranch delivery. Over the last few years, these initiatives have stopped. Reciprocal borrowing privileges still occur. The contraction of this partnership has come about due to staff changes and changing priorities. Diminished interest and enthusiasm for the partnership resulted in a diminished partnership.

### **Joint use libraries**

Coming out of this research on public-academic library partnerships across Canada were three examples of existing joint use libraries. These library partnerships are significantly different in structure from each other, providing unique examples of how academic and public libraries can work together in bringing library service to their constituents from the same physical site. Due to the intense nature of joint use library partnerships and the additional stresses it places on the partnership structure, delving more deeply into these joint use partnerships brings to the forefront key elements for any successful partnership: commitment, interest, and belief in the partnership's value.

#### *Brantford*

The city of Brantford, located in southern Ontario, has struggled with economic downturn, the loss of major manufacturers, and high unemployment; in the 1990s the downtown had collapsed and attempts at revitalization had failed.<sup>5</sup> To help increase options for local people to access further education, a group of determined citizens worked with various universities in the surrounding area to encourage the development of a satellite campus in Brantford. At the same time, the city of Brantford was focusing on ways to revitalize the downtown core. Late in 1998, the president of Wilfrid Laurier University, Dr Bob Rosehart, signed an agreement with the city to establish a campus of the university in the downtown of Brantford – to be opened in September 1999.<sup>6</sup>

One challenge for the fledgling campus was to ensure that Laurier Brantford students had access to the same resources and services as students on the main campus in Waterloo. With only 39 students at Laurier Brantford in that opening year, the university could not justify the establishment of a separate university library. With the Brantford Public Library (BPL) as a major player in the downtown, establishing an agreement for library service to be delivered through the public library seemed feasible. Not only was the partnership one of practicality for the university library, it was also an opportunity for Brantford Public Library to align with the city of Brantford's strategic priorities and enhance its role in the revitalization of the downtown.

The partnership between the libraries was formalized through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) approved by the Brantford Public Library board and the Wilfrid Laurier University senate and board of governors. This document is reviewed and renewed annually to allow for the easy incorporation of such changes as the annual fee paid by Wilfrid Laurier to BPL based on the number of fulltime equivalent students. The partnership sees the university library located within and as a part of the public library. There is a university library collection, currently comprised of approximately 10,000 items, along with computers set up specifically for Laurier students. All circulation and general reference is done by BPL staff; however, there has always been one or two Laurier librarians associated with the Laurier Brantford campus for instruction, collection development, and research assistance. There is an element of reciprocity within the agreement as well. Every Laurier Brantford student, regardless of their place of residence, receives a BPL card and citizens of Brantford are eligible for a community borrower card from Laurier providing them access to the print collections of the Tri-university Group (Tug) of libraries – Wilfrid Laurier, University of Guelph, and University of Waterloo.

As with any partnership, the BPL-Wilfrid Laurier University partnership has experienced, and is experiencing, challenges. Initially, the libraries needed to determine how best to manage two different circulation systems and catalogues. Space for the growing Laurier collection needs to be found within the Brantford Public Library. For the university library there have been ongoing challenges with providing librarian support for Laurier Brantford students and faculty. Initially a librarian was designated part time for Brantford and part time at the Laurier campus. Very quickly this service proved inadequate for the reference and instructional needs of the increasing numbers of students and programs; there are now 1.5 librarians designated by the university library for Laurier Brantford and assistance is still required from the librarians based at the main Laurier campus. With the rapid growth of the student body at Laurier Brantford, the university library has found the financial requirement of the partnership a constant challenge. The budget line to pay BPL has not kept pace with the fee increases.

The BPL-Wilfrid Laurier University partnership has seen a growth in student numbers of nearly 7000%, from 39 students in 1999 to about 2700 in 2011. The challenge for the partnership is sustainability, as enrolment and the number and variety of university programs grow. Both libraries value the partnership and do not want to lose the positive aspects of the connections – the shared understanding, shared advocacy, shared collections, and reciprocal borrowing. The space issues and the limited hours of access to the university's print collections are causing some strain and may lead to a reconfigured, but continued, partnership.

### *Manitoba*

Moving west to Manitoba, there are exciting new developments between the University College of the North and First Nations communities in the centre and north of the province. One of Canada's newer universities, the University College of the North (UCN) evolved from a community college seven years ago. As the library at the UCN developed, there was a growing awareness of the need to improve the services to the people of northern Manitoba. This area of 466,000 square kilometres (180,000 square miles) is home to 83,000 people – 67% of whom are First Nations with a large percentage under the age of 15 – and there were only six public libraries. The university wanted to establish a presence within communities and help communities see the university as their institution. At the same time the university was committed to helping increase literacy levels.

The UCN library has worked with local communities to establish two joint use university-public libraries. These libraries are located in regional centres; the first one opened in Norway House in 2009, the second

on the Chemawawin Cree Nation at Easterville in September 2011. Each library houses a permanent public library collection funded by the community plus two rotating collections, one of academic material to support the university programs taught at the different sites, the other of public library material as additional support for educational needs. First Nations people are hired as library staff. The university library provides ongoing training for the local library staff and assists with further education funding if the local staff do not have the required credentials.

These joint use libraries are established within the parameters of a formal MOU outlining the responsibilities of the university along with those of each community. Each community covers the costs for the library facility, including utilities, and some of the personnel costs, while the university pays the remainder of staff salaries, benefits, and training. In addition, the university library provides electronic resources, technical services, the integrated library system, and all administrative functions. Each library is governed by a library board with representation from the community and the university. It is the library board which interviews and recommends the staff to hire; this means that the libraries are not required to work within the university's selection procedures.

The development of these first joint use libraries between the UCN and the communities of Easterville and Norway House has sparked interest from other communities. Discussions are now underway between UCN and three other communities. The emphasis in developing the first two joint use libraries was in providing resources to a region and not a single institution, community or user group; as the university develops further partnerships with communities, it wants to ensure that this focus remains.

### *Edmonton*

In Alberta, a different kind of joint use partnership exists between the Edmonton Public Library (EPL) and the University of Alberta Libraries. In the mid 2000s, university libraries in Canada had begun establishing small collections to serve the recreational reading needs of students. In Edmonton, the University of Alberta Library and EPL had partnered, and were partnering, in other initiatives; rather than proceed with establishing a university owned recreational reading collection, it was a natural step for the libraries to join together in providing services to university students. For the university library, an added benefit to enhancing its partnership with EPL was how well the partnership supported the university's goal of increased civic engagement.

Following meetings between the two libraries and an aligning of visions – the university library originally envisioned an unstaffed hold pickup space, EPL was thinking of a space that was branded and staffed – a unique example of joint use came into existence in 2008. eplGO is a mini branch of the Edmonton Public Library housed within the University of Alberta's Cameron (science) Library. eplGO was set up primarily as a holds pickup location with a small print collection, limited reference, and no programming. It is a separate functioning unit within the Cameron Library, with its own staffing and circulation. While EPL pays for the furnishings, security gates, computers, staff, and collections for eplGO, the University of Alberta Libraries provides space and associated services – custodial service, phone and data lines, and utilities.

A key element of the University of Alberta-EPL partnership is the LPass. University of Alberta students register for an EPL library card online where they agree to the provision of their personal information to EPL. In the registration process their student card barcode is transferred to the EPL database and becomes their EPL card. There is no charge for university students to become members of EPL. To compensate EPL for these new memberships, the University of Alberta has negotiated an annual payment to the Edmonton Public Library. This financial transfer was an essential part of the partnership agreement, as EPL would only commit to eplGO if staffing costs could be recovered. It is this element in the agreement that makes this partnership structure uniquely Albertan; Alberta is the only province in Canada where there is a public library card fee (some communities in Quebec also charge a library card fee but it is not a province wide practice).

eplGo has been extremely successful. With minimal promotion, it has reached a point where it is circulating more items than some of EPL's smaller branches. In contrast to the Cameron Library's 24 hour service, eplGO is open during the day during the week and still experiences 8000 visits per month.

But the benefits have not been experienced solely by the public library. The location of eplGO within the Cameron Library has resulted in increased visits to the Cameron Library by faculty and students who may not otherwise come into the physical library space. The fall of 2011 has seen the largest number of LPass registrations ever, 6000 students, demonstrating that eplGO is clearly serving a student need.

As with all partnerships, the EPL-University of Alberta partnership has experienced challenges, particularly with the delivery of materials to eplGO. Some issues have been dealt with through conversation and negotiation, others have worked out over time. The smooth operation of eplGO within the context of the University of Alberta Libraries is due in part to the mature relationship and partnership experience between the two libraries.

### **Elements in successful partnerships**

The examples of joint use academic-public library partnerships, along with the other partnerships revealed in the research, highlight the elements necessary for successful partnerships of any kind. The enthusiasm and commitment of both partners is crucial for a partnership to survive and thrive. Where that does not exist, the partnership will founder. The joint use partnerships were all inspired by a need of one or both partners. This need acts as the motivator to both establish and sustain the partnership. When the need no longer exists, the partnership will change or dissolve. Partnerships develop where partnerships already exist – as one interviewee stated ‘collaboration breeds collaboration’.<sup>7</sup> The more experienced a library is with partnerships, the more likely that library will consider partnering with others to provide a service or respond to a need.

Based on the research, partnerships between individual academic and public libraries are rare in Canada. Aside from participation in province wide consortia, the two types of libraries do not commonly partner. A number of responses from academic libraries to the emailed survey admitted to having no partnerships with public libraries but showed a definite interest in learning what others were doing in this area. While the divide between academic and public libraries at times appears unbridged, there is a growing perception of the value in building connections. Research that brings to light the varied partnerships in existence helps libraries understand the options, benefits, and key elements of successful partnerships between public and academic libraries.

### **Learning outcomes**

- collaboration breeds collaboration. The more experienced a library is with partnerships, the more likely that library will participate in partnerships. It is the initial partnership that is the most difficult.
- partnerships develop in response to a need. This is clearly seen in the joint use partnership examples – the Wilfrid Laurier University Library needed to provide library services to an initial student body of 39 in Brantford; the University College of the North, along with the communities in central and northern Manitoba, want to increase local literacy levels; the University of Alberta Libraries wanted to respond to a need of the student body.
- in order for partnerships to work and remain sustainable in the face of challenges, senior members of each library must believe in the value that the partnership brings.

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