

Public Library Services Branch – Provincewide Electronic Resources Acquisition Plan 2016-2019

Introduction

Electronic resources are a significant component of Alberta Public Library Network services. They are high-value tools that are distributed across Alberta through public libraries. An effective and transparent process for the purpose, selection and evaluation of provincewide e-resources is critical.

Public Library Services Branch (PLSB) strives to provide electronic resources in response to provincial needs through the Public Library Network. Where there is widespread provincial need and demand for a product it can be more economical to acquire it provincially rather than through local licenses. PLSB's investment allows stakeholder library boards to direct their funds to additional resources to meet local needs. These principles are embedded in the Branch's [Electronic Resources Operational Policy](#).

Background

PLSB consultations

PLSB has consulted on the delivery of provincewide e-resources since the Public Library Network Technology Unit was created in October 2013. Consultation first began when representatives from the Public Library Network Nodes helped draft the Public Library Network Policy over the summer of 2012 and affirmed it in October 2012.

Subsequent consultations consisted of the following:

- Small and large group discussions with Network Node representatives in October 2013
- Follow-up meeting to affirm results of group discussions and subsequent e-content policy priorities in February 2014
- Meeting with Network Node representatives to validate budget priorities for 2015/16 in October 2014
- Survey of Nodes in May 2015 to address issues of notification and planning
- Follow-up survey of Nodes on selection and evaluation in November 2015
- Survey of all library boards in May 2016

PLSB staff has also given presentations and updates on the provincewide e-resource suite at various conferences (including the Alberta Library Conference) and meetings of library staff and trustees (e.g., system library manager meetings, ALTA, APLAC, etc.) across the province. When possible, we have allotted time in each of these presentations to ask participants for their ideas and feedback. We also received comments via email.

To supplement the surveys and other interactions, PLSB staff conducted a review in Spring 2016 of all Plans of Service and comments submitted in the Annual Reports to determine common Service Responses and priorities identified by library boards.

Procurement process

In March of 2014, the Government of Alberta (GoA) issued a directive prohibiting sole-sourced ministry acquisitions outside of accepted trade agreement exceptions. Public library e-resources do not meet the qualifications of a trade agreement exception and so all subsequent contracts for provincewide e-resources must be openly tendered.

As a public entity, the GoA seeks to ensure value for money by following an open and competitive procurement process. Consequently, all GoA Departments have a duty to follow the principles of integrity, fairness, transparency and openness when contracting for services.

PLSB has successfully completed its first solicitation with the RFP entitled *Platform for Alberta Ebooks*. With lessons learned from this undertaking, staff will move ahead with subsequent solicitations.

Current initiatives

Current suite of resources

Public Library Services Branch (PLSB) has been directly supporting access to e-resources since November 2013. The current suite consists of the following four resources:

Product	Product Category	Vendor	Resource Acquired	Current Expiry
Zinio (platform only)	e-magazines	Recorded Books	November 1, 2013	September 30, 2017
hoopla	streaming & downloadable media and ebooks	CVS Midwest Tape	March 1, 2014	September 30, 2017
Mango	language learning software	P3 Library Services	October 1, 2014	September 30, 2017
PressReader	e-newspapers	ProQuest	January 1, 2015	December 31, 2016

Some of these initial offerings are a continuation of some of the most popular offerings previously available through The Alberta Library (TAL). When TAL was no longer able to maintain these licenses, PLSB picked them up (on the basis of stakeholder demand) to ensure continuity.

One note of importance: There have been no additions or deletions to the suite supported by PLSB since its inception.

Priorities and Plan 2016/17 and beyond

Priorities

Based on the consultations outlined above, as well as a review of Government of Alberta strategic priorities, PLSB has determined priorities for the next three years based on the following Service Responses (listed in no particular order):

- Celebrate Diversity
- Know Your Community
- Be an Informed Citizen
- Welcome to Canada
- Find, Evaluate and Use Information
- Satisfy Curiosity
- Create Young Readers

PLSB will seek out resources that meet some or all of these Service Responses. It is anticipated the e-resource offerings will meet more than one at the same time, as there is some overlap in these Service Responses.

In addition to Service Response priorities, it is PLSB's aim to ensure continuity in resources offered. Our survey results indicate that stakeholders are generally pleased with the content areas covered by the current suite. We will prioritize those categories in our upcoming solicitations.

For those Service Response areas where PLSB is unable to secure an electronic resource, staff will explore other ways to meet those priority areas (e.g., symposia, research projects, partnerships, etc.)

Timeline

PLSB staff are now in the initial stages of launching several solicitations over the next year. The schedule is as follows:

Product Category	Solicitation Period	Anticipated contract start date	Minimum expiry date
e-newspaper resource	September – December 2016	January 1, 2017	December 31, 2019
streaming/downloadable media resource	January – April 2017	April 1, 2017	March 31, 2020
language learning software	May – August 2017	October 1, 2017	September 30, 2020
e-magazine platform	May – August 2017	October 1, 2017	September 30, 2020
learning platform	September – December 2017 (tentative)	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2020

Each of these resources, once acquired, will be in place for a minimum of three (3) years, with the option to extend twice for an additional two (2) years (seven years in total). This allows for stability in the short-term and flexibility for the long-term.

Stakeholder involvement

PLSB recognizes the importance of having stakeholder input into the decision-making process. To that end, we will seek out feedback on the RFP requirements for each solicitation as we did with the Alberta Ebooks RFP. We also plan to include up to two individuals from the public library community on the RFP evaluation team for our solicitations. We successfully piloted this strategy with the Alberta Ebooks RFP and will make it our continued practice.

We will be issuing a call for volunteers shortly to sit on the evaluation teams for the four solicitations outlined above. Specifically, we are looking for individuals who:

- Currently work at a Network Participant library
- Are familiar with general procurement rules and process (a working knowledge of current trade agreements is also desirable)
- Are invested in the success of these initiatives through PLSB

The time commitment is dependent on the number of responses received to our RFP. However, it is not minimal. Each team member is expected to familiarize themselves with the full content of the RFP, read through every proposal thoroughly and score them using the rubric provided. The team will have a minimum of two face to face meetings – one half-day kickoff meeting and one full-day scoring consensus meeting. Depending on the type and number of proposals received, there may also be a requirement to attend demo meetings with vendors and a second follow-up scoring consensus meeting. Team members will be compensated for travel costs.

Conclusion

PLSB will continue to work with its partners in the Alberta Public Library Network to provide equitable access to a broad range of resources for Albertans. This will be achieved by leveraging efficiencies of scale where appropriate while at the same time respecting the autonomy of local and regional boards in providing resources and services that meet the unique needs of their communities.

Any questions about this plan may be directed to the following PLSB staff:

Kerry Anderson, Manager, Public Library Network Technology
kerry.anderson@gov.ab.ca; 780-644-5487

Katrina Borowski, Network Consultant – Infrastructure
katrina.borowski@gov.ab.ca; 780-638-1185.

July 29, 2016

Response to Survey Comments

As mentioned above, PLSB issued a survey to all library boards earlier in 2016. We were very pleased to receive many responses and lots of feedback. The survey also revealed some concerns that we would like to address:

Comment: I think the resources need to be offered for a longer period of time before they are ‘chopped’. It takes a long time to get patrons aware and using these resources but by then, PLSB has decided that the usage is not high enough and they are gone.

Response: No resources have been “chopped” since PLSB began directly supporting province-wide electronic resources in 2013. Prior to that, TAL had managed some e-content licenses for public libraries. Any decisions regarding additions or deletions to that suite were made by TAL and its members based on their own very sound and rigorous analysis.

Comment: If PLSB is looking to change eResource offerings, maybe compile a list of possibilities and distribute the list for input from individual libraries. See what your customers want.

Response: Our procurement environment precludes us from selecting from a list of possibilities. Instead, we create and issue a list of requirements (which we vet with our stakeholders) through an RFP and get the vendors to tell us how they will meet our needs with their product. It can be argued that this helps us get what we really want rather than settle merely for what’s available.

Comment: The challenge is staff learning how to use them to their full benefit and sharing that knowledge with the patrons. Ensuring that patrons and community members are aware of these resources is also a challenge. Some type of marketing campaign would be beneficial i.e.: TV commercials

Response: PLSB includes these elements as key requirements in each RFP. Our current vendor partners offer varying degrees of support in each of these areas. We work with them to continuously improve that support, particularly in the area of staff training.

Awareness is very important to the success of any service. However, the PLSB suite of resources is a subset of what is available through each library. Library systems and urban libraries offer many more resources than just the four PLSB supports. It would be difficult to do provincewide marketing that would be suitable for every library because of the wide variety of offerings in different communities. Instead, we rely on our vendor partners and our Network Nodes to produce any necessary marketing materials or campaigns.

Comment: It would be valuable to be able to get stats for all of these resources on a library-by-library basis (within a library system).

Response: Yes! We agree. Each vendor operates differently and this is something we are working with vendors on.