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## **Letter from the Chairman of the Board**

August 16, 2010

Every library (and library system) in Alberta, must file a Plan of Service with the Public Library Services Branch of the provincial government. The Plan of Service says what we expect to do: to provide service to our customers – the libraries within our system.

This year, the Public Library Services Branch has put a new system in place. In the past, Boards often pulled out the last Plan and updated it; sometimes this meant only the dates were changed! To have a meaningful Plan more needs to be done.

In preparing a Plan, you need to ask your customers how you are doing now; are you meeting their needs and expectations? What do your customers want you to do for them? This means performing a needs assessment. In the case of a System, we need to ask our customers, our member libraries, how we are doing now. To also find out what our customers need from us, we need to include the non-member libraries as well.

To help answer these questions, Northern Lights Library System (NLLS) set up a focus group, facilitated by Ken Feser (from the Public Library Services Branch). This was a group of people representing every aspect of our customers: large and small, member and non-member, library managers, board members and municipality representatives. NLLS staff and Executive Committee did not participate in these discussions and were not present during the focus group meeting. The group had some good discussions and gave NLLS some great feedback.

Ken Feser then met with the Executive Committee to discuss the results of the focus group. Ken Feser led the Executive through a strategic planning process to discuss and evaluate where NLLS goes from here. After grouping and prioritizing many excellent ideas a new Plan of Service began to emerge.

The new planning process takes a lot more time and effort; but I think the results are also better. While the Plan must remain flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances, the Plan indicates what Northern Lights will focus on over the next three years.

This has taken a lot of work by many people, and I want to thank everyone for the effort they put in. Job well done.

Larry Tiedemann  
Chairman of the Board  
Northern Lights Library System

## **Executive Summary**

Every three years library systems in Alberta present to the Public Library Services Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs a Plan of Service which will guide systems through that time period.

A new Mission Statement was developed to more clearly indicate our “raison d’etre”. “Fostering excellent library services in northeastern Alberta” shows what we do and where we do it.

The Executive Committee and Administration of Northern Lights Library System worked through the process of information gathering by sending out surveys to a cross section of the population and by reviewing and analyzing the Plans of Service of our partner libraries. The information gathered was discussed with a focus group from a different cross section of the population. Goals and Objectives were set and timelines were put into place.

The priorities presented to the administration were; Communication, Services, Accreditation/Standards, Advocacy and Planning.

The process followed for this Plan of Service was taken from the Public Library Services Branch recommended book by Sandra Nelson, “Strategic Planning for Results”.

This new style for the Plan of Service is a result of the new direction of planning and reporting taken by the Public Library Services Branch.

## **Mission: Fostering excellent library services in northeastern Alberta.**

### **Historical Background**

The Northeast Library Steering Committee was formed in January 1985 to actively lobby for a regional library system after three successful years of cooperation among the five libraries serving the M.D. of Bonnyville area. Based on the belief that by working together the public libraries in the region could better use their material and human resources, the Steering Committee investigated the feasibility of establishing a co-operative library system in the Northeast. Following several years of effort by volunteers and project staff, the System was established in April 1990. Today, twenty years later, there are 53 member municipalities in the Northern Lights Library System (NLLS), representing 43 member libraries.

In 2001, NLLS moved to a new location in Elk Point, formerly the old Pan Canadian building on Highway 41. In 2007, NLLS received a grant from Alberta Infrastructure to renovate and expand their facilities. After a year of consultation and planning, construction began in 2009, with Francis Ng as the architect. Construction is expected to be completed before the Grand Opening on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

### **Methodology**

*Information Gathering:* The staff at NLLS headquarters used a variety of methods to ascertain the needs of the community it serves. A survey was prepared and posted to the NLLS website (see Appendix A). Member and Non-Member municipalities, library Executive Committees and library managers were invited to complete the three-part survey online; thirty-five surveys were returned. The Plans of Service, submitted by each member library to NLLS headquarters, were reviewed and analyzed, focusing on the goals that the libraries had chosen to act upon in their own communities. These goals were assessed for how NLLS headquarters could support the goals of its member libraries. The third piece of information studied were statistics and reports from the HelpDesk, the online support site where NLLS staff respond to questions and requests submitted by library staff. The analysis looked at the number and type of questions.

Once the information was compiled, it was presented to a community focus group on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010, facilitated by Ken Feser of Municipal Affairs, Public Library Services Branch. The group was comprised of representatives from small, medium and large libraries, and included library managers, Executive Committee members, municipality representatives and representatives from non-member municipalities. Approximately fifteen people attended the day-long meeting.

*Setting Goals and Objectives:* The community planning group and the Executive Committee determined the needs of the NLLS community and put those needs into nine general categories. From these, general goals were written. The purpose for general goals is so that over the years, specific actions can be applied to them, which can change from year to year, in order to meet the objectives. If goals are specific, changes in funding, circumstances or technology could render them inappropriate or no longer suitable. Specific goals, once met, do not allow for continued improvement. Also, specific goals mean far more numerous goals, rendering the final document unwieldy, and therefore less likely to be acted upon.

Timelines were given both in the objectives, as well as for each specific action. Actions that have been ranked as lower priorities will be given longer time periods for completion. This will allow priority items to be dealt with first, leaving those items that are less of a priority for a later date when there may be more time available to be allotted to them. Objectives should be reviewed annually in order to measure progress; action items should be reviewed as they come due, or on an ongoing basis.

## **Organization**

Nine priorities were presented to the staff. Of these, the first five were considered to be of greater importance. The remaining four were incorporated into the actions of the top five.

The five top priorities are:

1. Communication
2. Services
3. Accreditation/ Standards
4. Advocacy
5. Planning

**Definitions** (Taken from the Sandra Nelson book, *Strategic Planning for Results*.)

*Goal:* The benefit your community (or target population within your community) will receive because the library provides a specific service.

*Objective:* The way the library will measure its progress toward reaching a goal. It includes a measure, a target, and an expected date of completion.

Area of Emphasis: <b>COMMUNICATION</b>			
<i>Goal:</i> The Northern Lights Library System community will receive clear and prompt communication, based on a strong communication plan.			
<i>Objective:</i> 80% of the Northern Lights Library System community will express satisfaction with communication from Northern Lights Library System headquarters annually.			
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
	1. Develop and implement a communication plan	Public Services	January 2011
	2. Develop and implement a marketing plan	Public Services	March 2011
	3. Communicate with/lobby the Federal Government	NLLS Executive Committee & Director	Ongoing
	4. Approach MPs to get native services	NLLS Executive Committee & Director	Ongoing
	5. Communicate need for funding	NLLS Executive Committee & Director	Ongoing
	6. Communicate with member libraries on a regular basis	All Staff	Ongoing
	7. Communicate with municipalities about member libraries	Director, et.al.	Ongoing
	8. Communicate with school Executive Committees about possible services	Director, et.al.	Ongoing
	9. Have one staff person (point of contact) for information gathering [contact libraries and get answers]	Receptionist	Ongoing

	10. Devise a cost-effective, positive method of face-to-face (human touch) communication	Staff	Ongoing
	11. Promote two-way communication	Staff & Executive Committee	Ongoing
	12. Ensure flow of in-house communications	Staff	Ongoing
	13. Ensure a consistent message is sent out by all members of NLLS Headquarters staff	Staff	Ongoing
	14. Provide all approved minutes of NLLS Executive Committee meetings to members	Executive Secretary	Ongoing
	15. Promote the services and achievements of NLLS	Staff	Ongoing

Area of Emphasis: <b>SERVICES</b>			
<i>Goal:</i> The Northern Lights Library System community's needs will be met by the services provided by Northern Lights Library System headquarters staff			
<i>Objective #1:</i> 80% of the Northern Lights Library System community will express satisfaction with the service from Northern Lights Library System headquarters annually.			
<i>Objective # 2:</i> The majority of the actions set down in this document will be completed by September 2013			
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
	1. Promote the customer databases (HelpDesk, TRACpac, website, listserv, etc.)	Staff	Ongoing
	2. Utilize remote IT assistance where possible (e.g. go-to-assist, videoconferencing)	Staff	Implemented in 2008 & Ongoing
	3. Improve services with technology – to support speed and accuracy	IT Staff	Ongoing
	4. Ensure responses to requests are within set standards ( <i>see Appendix B</i> )	Staff	Ongoing
	5. Use technologies to increase efficiency	Staff	Annually & Ongoing
	6. Director to visit every municipality every year and every library every 3 years	Director	Annually & Ongoing
	7. Yearly consultant visits to each library	Public Services & Information Technology Staff	Annually & Ongoing

	8. Reach out to members – customer service-call individual libraries twice per month	Staff	Ongoing
	9. Maintain excellent human resources policy	Assistant Director	Ongoing
	10. Expand into non-traditional ways of providing service	Staff	Ongoing
	11. Streamline turnaround [materials processing]	Bibliographic Services Staff	December 2010
	12. Charge \$ for services/support provided beyond a threshold	Assistant Director	December 31, 2010 & Ongoing
	13. Explore the possibility of outlets and reading rooms.	Director	2013

Area of Emphasis: <b>ACCREDITATION / STANDARDS</b>			
<i>Goal:</i> The Northern Lights Library System community will have access to means of accreditation and standards			
<i>Objective:</i> The following items will be available by September 2012			
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
	1. NLLS will provide library standards (via Municipal Affairs)	Public Services Staff	December 2011
	2. Provide HR support – develop a “help sheet”/automated support tools	Staff	Ongoing
	3. Competency exams to show the level of knowledge of library staff	Staff	March 2012
	4. Every library manager should be given a pre-determined level of training	Staff	Ongoing
	5. Set out learning plan for all management and staff	Director & Assistant Director	After December 2011
	6. Promote trustee/Executive Committee training	Executive Committee	2011

Area of Emphasis: <b>ADVOCACY</b>			
<i>Goal:</i> The Northern Lights Library System community will be assisted in their advocacy efforts at the local, provincial, and federal levels.			
<i>Objective:</i> 80% of the Northern Lights Library System community will express satisfaction with the advocacy assistance from Northern Lights Library System headquarters annually.			
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
	1. Welcome new councils and library staff to visit our centre of excellence (building)	Director	September 2010
	2. Invite political members [politicians] and staff to events	Director & Assistant Director	September 2010
	3. Trustee recruitment	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	4. Lobby government for sustainable funding	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	5. Lobby to increase \$ commitments from municipalities	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	6. Partner with funding sources beyond government	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	7. Lobby government with one voice [all systems, whole library community]	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	8. Expand advocacy efforts: include training library staff and Executive Committees to lobby locally	Executive Committee, Staff, et. al.	Ongoing
	9. Consult with aboriginal people groups and related departments to challenge federal native policy	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing

	10. Consider participating sitting on selection Committees for provincial organizations	Executive Committee & Director	Ongoing
	11. Work with province to assist (at a cost) other ministries	Executive Committee & Board	Ongoing
	12. Promotion of system to non-members	Executive Committee Chair & Director	Ongoing

Area of Emphasis: <b>PLANNING</b>			
<i>Goal:</i> The Northern Lights Library System community will receive assistance in all aspects of developing all of their essential plans.			
<i>Objective:</i> 80% of the Northern Lights Library System community will express satisfaction with planning assistance from Northern Lights Library System headquarters annually.			
	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Department Responsible</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
	1. Provide consultation basis for member libraries': plan of service, technology plan, marketing & communication plan, facility plan, etc.	Staff	Ongoing
	2. Lead by example	Staff	Ongoing
	3. Put \$ into reserves for future expansion	Executive Committee	Ongoing
	4. Complete executive election procedure	Executive Committee Chair	September 2010
	5. Continue to sign up members: make non-membership a lonely, unattractive place to be	Director	Ongoing
	6. Prepare for growth with a growth plan [e.g. dealing with large new members]	Executive Committee	Ongoing
	7. Create a stronger provincial advocacy plan	Executive Committee	Ongoing
	8. Policy: implement, review, update	All	Ongoing

	9. Attractive recognition and awards strategy	Executive Committee	June 2011
	10. Maintain facilities and have effective capital replacement plan	Assistant Director & Executive Committee	Ongoing
	11. Review current processes by an outside firm	Executive Committee	As required

## Appendix A

The following needs assessment survey was posted to the Northern Lights Library System website and invitations were sent out to library managers, library Executive Committee chairs, town councils and municipalities, both belonging to and non-members of the Northern Lights Library System.

### Northern Lights Library System Needs Assessment Survey

The Northern Lights Library System (NLLS), currently providing services to 43 libraries and 53 municipalities, is undergoing the process of writing a new Plan of Service. As part of this process, we are soliciting feedback of what services you would like NLLS to provide, *regardless* of what is currently being offered. While previous surveys have collected information on your level of satisfaction with our current services, this survey is designed to focus on what you see as needs in your community, specifically in your library, that NLLS can help meet.

Thank you for your time and your assistance in helping us to make the Northern Lights Library System work better for you.

1. Please identify your relationship to the Northern Lights Library System:

**Member** of Northern Lights Library System:

- Library Manager
- Library Executive Committee Chair
- Library Executive Committee Member
- Member of Town Council
- Representative of Municipality

**OR**

**Non-member** of Northern Lights Library System:

- Library Manager
- Library Executive Committee Chair
- Library Executive Committee Member
- Member of Town Council
- Representative of Municipality
- School Executive Committee Representative

2. Please rate the importance of these services for your library/community; 1 being NOT important to 5 being VERY important.

*Public Services*

Weekly Delivery of materials from other libraries

1      2      3      4      5

Daily Delivery of materials from other libraries

Inter Library Loan (borrowing from outside the library system)

Intra Library Loan (borrowing from within library system)

Program support (e.g. Summer Reading Program, public performance rights, etc.)

Reference assistance for librarians

Planning assistance (e.g. Plan of Service, Annual Report)

Collection development consultation (e.g. weeding, collection assessment)

Collection lending provision (e.g. blocks, large print, professional development resources)

Access to CNIB and multi-lingual resources

Support of consultants (e.g. human resources assistance, space planning)

Marketing and Communication assistance

Access to audio books, eBooks and videos online

Online library catalogue

*Training and Education*

Librarian conference

Professional Development events/workshops

Professional Development webinars (online training)

Mobile computer training lab

HelpDesk (Technical support)

*Technology*

Polaris\* training (Polaris is the system used by libraries within NLLS to check in and out books, manage library inventory and keep track of patron accounts)

Availability of internet assistance

Availability of wireless internet assistance

Availability of website assistance

Availability of email assistance

Hardware and software support (purchasing, troubleshooting, etc.)

Guidance in implementing new technologies (video conferencing, social software, etc.)

Mobile technologies, i.e. iPhone applications

*Bibliographic Services*

Assistance in purchasing library materials

Automated book selection lists for purchase consideration of library materials

Patron-ready materials, customized to your library

Patron-ready materials, **not** customized to your library

*Administration Services*

Bulk purchasing of supplies (for purpose of cost reduction)

3. What other needs, not already mentioned in question 2, would you like to see provided by Northern Lights Library System?

*Thank you for your time and input!*

## **Appendix B**

### **Helpdesk Request Response Time**

Acquired as a solution to improving NLLS service and creating efficiencies for member libraries, the Northern Lights Library System Helpdesk was first introduced in Spring of 2009. Since its inception there have been 3860 requests. These fall into four general categories: Public Services, Bibliographic Services, Information Technology Services and Administrative Services. Within these categories there are many subcategories of which the most common are Polaris inquiries, materials, supplies, hardware and software order assistance, technology assistance, collections assistance and cataloguing assistance.

Northern Lights Library System is committed to providing excellent timely service, and as such we will adhere to the following first response times to inquiries:

**For urgent requests, requesters will receive a first response from Northern Lights Staff within 24 hours within the NLLS staff work week.**

Note: Urgent response requests include problems that prevent the library from functioning, including lack of an internet connection, lack of a Polaris connection or issues with critical Polaris functions (Login, Check out/in, TRACpac searching, Patron registration).

**For Non-urgent requests, requesters will receive a first response from Northern Lights Staff within 48 hours within the NLLS staff work week.**