

# Nova Scotia Provincial Library Public Consultation

April-June 2006



The public have their say at the Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre.



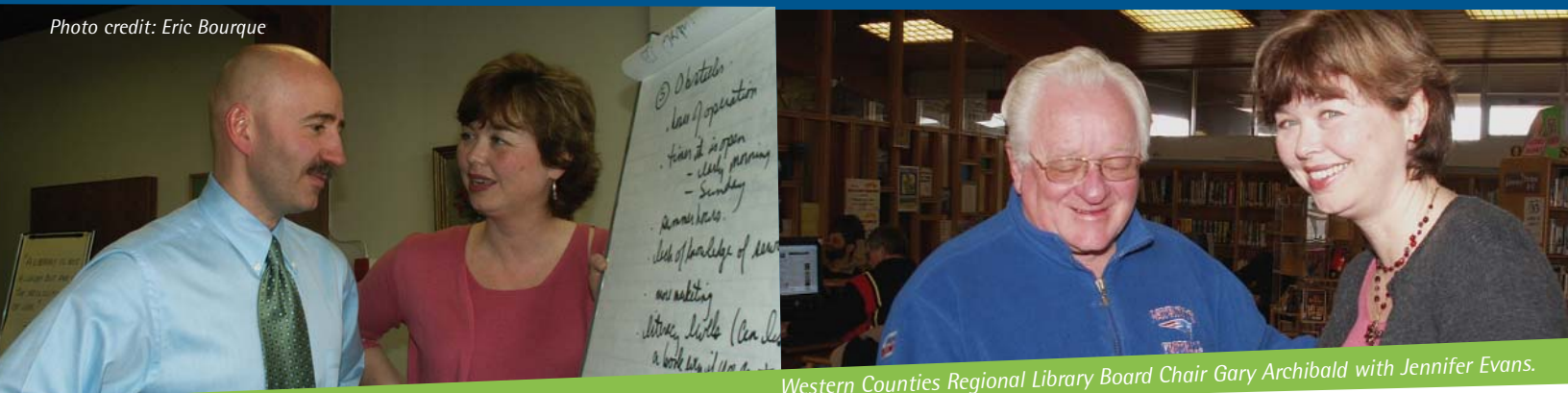
Jennifer Evans with Amarinda and Fayth, members of BLAST, teen friends of the Colchester-East Hants Regional Library.



Keshen Goodman Public Library, Halifax.

Atlantica consultant Tony Mancini with Provincial Librarian Jennifer Evans.

Photo credit: Eric Bourque



Western Counties Regional Library Board Chair Gary Archibald with Jennifer Evans.

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*Media Release, April 10, 2006*

## Province To Begin Public Library Consultations

What do you want from a public library in the twenty-first century? Nova Scotia's provincial librarian, Jennifer Evans, will host a series of town hall meetings between Wednesday, April 12 and early June to answer that question.

"Libraries fill a critical need in our communities and it has been some time since we asked people for their opinions," said Ms. Evans. "We are hoping for a lot of interest and a lot of good ideas from people right across the province."

Ms. Evans is also hoping to hear from people who do not visit libraries.

The consultations will focus on the benefits of public libraries, what the perfect public library would be like, and how the participants would promote the public library to others.

An online version of the survey will be available at the Provincial Library website at [www.library.ns.ca](http://www.library.ns.ca).

The feedback will be reviewed and developed into a report, in time for the Provincial Library's strategic planning sessions which are scheduled for late June. The report will be available on the website and through public libraries.

"Libraries and the communities they serve are changing and we need to keep up," said Ms. Evans. She cited the recent availability of free online versions of the World Book encyclopaedia and Chilton automotive manuals as examples of how library collections in Nova Scotia are evolving.

➡ *cont.*

Consultation schedule dates and locations of the town hall meetings are as follows:

- Wednesday, April 12* – *Westville Library, Westville*  
6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 19* – *NSCC Bridgewater, Bridgewater*  
6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 3* – *Windsor Library, Windsor*  
7:30 p.m.- 8:p.m.
- Thursday, May 4* – *Yarmouth Library, Yarmouth*  
4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.
- Monday, May 8* – *Truro Library, Truro*  
6:30 p.m. -8:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, May 10* – *Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre, Port Hawkesbury*  
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, May 11* – *McConnell Library, Sydney*  
6:30 p.m. -8:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, May 16* – *Four Fathers Library, Amherst*  
6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, June 6* – *Alderney Gate Library, Dartmouth*  
6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, June 8* – *Captain William Spry Public Library, Halifax*  
6:30 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.

There are 77 public library branches and seven mobile libraries in Nova Scotia, managed by nine regional library boards. Libraries also operate in universities, colleges, schools and other institutions but they are not part of the public library system or this consultation process.

The province contributed \$10.7 million to the operation of regional libraries across Nova Scotia in 2005-06. The government added another \$1 million to library funding in an April 4 announcement.

# Background and Purpose: *Public Libraries of the Future*

The Nova Scotia Provincial Library hosted the *Public Libraries of the Future* conference in January 2005. This conference was attended by library leaders from Nova Scotia and across North America, and looked at trends and changes in public library services. Participants were asked to imagine what the public library might look like in the year 2020. Keynote speakers looked at current thinking on technology, demographics, marketing, partnerships, and library buildings. One thing became clear: the public library of the future will have to be nimble, flexible, and responsive to an external environment that is constantly changing. This conference set the stage for a wide ranging exploration of how to move Nova Scotia's public libraries into the future.

There are nine regional library systems in Nova Scotia, with 77 branch libraries and 7 mobile libraries. Public Libraries in Nova Scotia are a mix of traditional and innovative service providers. They are winners of numerous awards at local, provincial, national, and international levels. In the mid-nineties, Nova Scotia public libraries were the first in the country to provide public access to the internet in each library branch. Nova Scotia regional libraries pride themselves on the strong collaborative approaches they take in planning, developing, and delivering key library services. However, libraries in Nova Scotia face many challenges in the early 21st Century - these challenges include demographic shifts, population decline, aging library buildings, perceived competition from Google, Amazon and Chapters, and rising operating costs, to highlight a few.



10,257 children participated in the 2005 Summer Reading Club.

In this challenging environment, how do Nova Scotians feel about their public libraries? What future do they envision for their public library?

The Nova Scotia Provincial Library, a division of the Higher Education Branch of the Department of Education, is tasked with providing province-wide leadership and support to the nine public library regions in Nova Scotia. Within the past decade, the Provincial Library has conducted two province-wide surveys: *Highlights of Public Libraries in Nova Scotia, General Population Survey (1996)* and *Where We Stand in your Community, A Snapshot of Nova Scotia Library Users (2002)*. The purpose of the 1996 survey was to collect critical information necessary to develop policies and guidelines for public libraries. The 2002 survey set out to get a snapshot of current library user perceptions of the social and economic contributions made by public libraries to the community. Both of these surveys asked library users to consider and assess existing library services. These earlier surveys have been used by the library regions to adjust open hours, to develop new programs, to develop staff training, and to make cases for funding.

Public libraries value input from Nova Scotians and understand the need to return to the public periodically on a formal basis to check response to services and to ensure library services are matching community interests. These surveys do not represent the only way public libraries seek public input; in fact, this is an ongoing process all around the province. Libraries encourage comments and suggestions both in person and online. The public can recommend purchases online. Public libraries also periodically conduct focus groups as they move into developing new services or new buildings.

## Process: *How did we consult?*

Building on the themes identified at the *Public Libraries of the Future* conference, the Consultation Planning Team at the Provincial Library developed a series of questions for the public to consider. Library stakeholders were engaged in frank and open discussions about the value of library services and were asked to identify the features and services of a public library of the future.

Each of the nine public library systems were fully engaged in the process. They selected the dates and locations for consultations held in their region. They also promoted the consultations locally and invited key stakeholders.

Once the schedule was established, the Department of Education issued a media release describing the purpose of the consultations. Atlantica Learning Corporation was engaged to facilitate the public consultations and to engage the public in critical, constructive discussions about public library services. The consultant assisted in the analysis of the results of the consultation sessions and the generation of this report. Atlantica also worked with the Provincial Library on their subsequent strategic plan.

Public participation was encouraged in a variety of ways. The regional libraries invited target groups to ensure a cross section of their population was represented. Users and non-users were encouraged to participate via media coverage. Those who could not attend the consultation in their region were invited to participate online.



The Provincial Librarian began each session with a brief presentation about the Provincial Library, the role of the Department of Education in supporting public libraries, the purpose of the sessions, and an overview of public libraries in Nova Scotia. Each regional library provided context with local highlights. The consultant then took the lead of each session and led the participants through the questions.

Flip chart notes capturing the public responses to each question were gathered at every session. The notes were transcribed at Provincial Library and immediately returned to the host public library so that they would have the raw data for their own planning. All of the original data gathered from the public sessions is available at [www.library.ns.ca](http://www.library.ns.ca).

254 Nova Scotians participated in the consultation. 220 people attended the public sessions, 18 people answered the questions online, and 16 people (including a sub set of 8 teens) completed print versions of the questions. While the consultation process was open to both library users and non-users, it is clear that all participants, both in-person and online, are people who have some degree of ongoing interaction with their public library.



# Consultation Questions

1. What do you value most about your public library?
2. Why do you come to the library?
3. How does the public library make a difference in your community?
4. What words come to mind when you think of a public library?
5. Are there obstacles to using a public library? If so, what are they?
6. If you were building the perfect 21st Century public library, what features (inside & out) would you include? What services would be offered?
7. If tomorrow you were placed in charge of your public library and were offered a 25% increase to your budget, what would be the first change you'd make?
8. If you were the marketing manager of your public library, what would you promote about the library and how would you deliver your message?
9. How would you see your library reaching out to remote and rural users?
10. In conversation with a group of friends, you discover that several of them do not have a library card. What would you say to convince them to use the library?

## What did we hear? Emerging themes

Several strong themes emerged from comments repeated consistently across the province. These themes emerged in urban, small town and rural library branches. While the language may have occasionally varied, the following paragraphs describe universal reactions to public libraries. A complete list of responses in each public library region is available at [www.library.ns.ca](http://www.library.ns.ca).



# Public Good

**"Our library is like a community front porch"**

*- Truro, Colchester-East Hants Public Library user*

When discussing why people value libraries, or how libraries make a difference in their communities, people began to talk about the public good. Many considered the library to have an equalizer quality. They talked about the library as the community focal point, as being open to all, as being welcoming, a communal space that crosses socio-economic barriers. The educational, cultural, and recreational value of the library was mentioned consistently. Libraries provide free access to collections, knowledge, and information. The notion of a neutral, open public space emerged.

**"The library is one of the last domains where you are a citizen, rather than a client. It is a public space, not corporatized; there are not many spaces left like that"**

*- Port Hawkesbury, Eastern Counties Regional Library Board member*

The role that the library plays in the local economy was also often cited. It was felt that many library buildings act as town anchors, drawing individuals into town centres, connecting them with local businesses. Community economic development was enabled by the destination factor of the public library as well as the provision of services that support a literate, information-enriched community. It was also felt that the ability to access information technology and to borrow materials without paying user fees supported both the individual and the collective.

Public libraries in Nova Scotia employ 527 people.

"There is no time when I feel richer or more privileged than when I walk in a library"

- Amherst, Cumberland Regional Library user

A significantly praised feature of this public good was the library staff. Participants praised the helpful attitudes, expertise, and encouraging natures of the people working in libraries. The ability of library staff to act as intermediaries in a world of prolific information was valued, as was the human interaction, individual to individual. The service ethic demonstrated by people in public libraries was spoken of with gratitude.

"The staff are so encouraging. I come to the library to browse, to dream, to talk to the nicest people I know"

- Dartmouth, Halifax Public Libraries user



## Collections

When asked what words come to mind when thinking about public libraries, a universally spoken word was "books". The culture of the book was evident in the consultations. The people attending were readers and book lovers. In a time when the cost of a hardcover book is more than \$30 and a paperback is over \$10, the ability to access large collections of reading materials either through browsing the shelves in a branch or browsing via the web-based library catalogue, was a hugely valued service.

**"Praise the book- a collaboration of so many minds and arts"**

*- Spryfield, Halifax Public Libraries user*

While the access to the book was noted, it was also clear that more access was desired. Wait lists for best sellers were too long. Sometimes the local library did not have the sought after titles and inter-library or inter-branch loan was required. When asked what they would do if they were made the head of the library and given a 25% increase in the budget, virtually every group called for more books.

The inter-library loan service is highly valued, because it allows library users access to collections not only from across their own region, but all of Nova Scotia as well as the rest of the country. The use of inter- library loan is valued not only by readers but by researchers such as genealogists and distance learners. In a couple of regions, participants noted the importance of the Library Book Rate, a preferential rate offered to public libraries by Canada Post for the mailing of library books across the country.

Nova Scotians borrowed over 7 million items in 2005-06 from their public library.

Books in multiple formats were mentioned. Along with the hard cover book, there was a keen desire to see more audio books made available- talking books for the print disabled and books on cd. Every group felt that their library did not have enough audio books.

**"My son is a long distance trucker. He discovered the library's books on CD. He listens to books when he's on the road-he told his trucker friends about the audio books and now they have library cards"**

*- Windsor, Annapolis Valley Regional Library Board member*

The visually impaired library users who attended the sessions called for more talking books; more variety of titles in a format that they could borrow. Until these collections grew, they felt that library collections were not as inclusive as they should be.

In addition to the desire for more books, several of the rural regions called for more music collections as well as magazines and newspapers. The necessity for the library to build strong cultural collections that included both visual and print literacy was discussed. In some regions, the importance of cultural diversity being reflected in collections as well as in staffing, was discussed.

**"Reading is cool and fun"**

*- Online survey user*



321,045 Nova Scotians have library cards.

# Promotions

Participants across the province were asked to think like marketing managers of their local library: what would they promote and how would they promote their library? It was suggested by participants that if libraries were under-used, it was because of a general lack of awareness of the range of services offered at the library. It was also suggested that libraries work with a variety of partners to build membership and use. Potential partners included schools (to reach children), local newspapers, and community papers. Library programming and new materials were considered items worthy of promotion.

**"I'd market the economic prudence of the library - the library has collections that keep money in your pocket"**

- Amherst, Cumberland Regional Library user

"More than just books" was suggested as a theme in more than one region. Access to the internet, music, movies, newspapers, and online databases were services considered worthy of further promotion. Programming for seniors, children, and teens were highlighted as being valuable potential marketing hooks. The practical nature of the library card was put forth as another promotional angle.

**"You have a health card, why don't you have a library card?"**

- Yarmouth, Western Counties Reference Library user





## Open hours

Libraries are not open often enough - this was stated in every region. The desire for more, and more convenient, open hours came up when participants were asked what they would do with an increase in their budget. Libraries should be open more evenings and on weekends. The idea of 24/7 service was mentioned more than once. All across the province, in each consultation, the public called for an increase in hours of operation. Insufficient open hours were also cited as an obstacle to library use.

## 21st Century Library Building and Services

Each group was asked to envision the library building of the future. While each region described a few unique features, certain design features were mentioned everywhere: lots of windows and natural light, one level only, substantial meeting and program space, lots of comfortable seating, good parking, exterior green space, and a revenue-generating café. The ideal location was the heart of the community where the library would be located near other key destinations. The public library was often considered to be an anchor of a town, a place that contributes to the economic viability of a downtown core. People were clearly looking for a warm and welcoming environment that supports the variety of activities that take place in libraries. It was also mentioned, more than once, that a library of the future would be environmentally friendly and built with local materials wherever possible. When asked about 21st Century services, the public called for state of the art technology, programming for all ages, and large and varied collections.

Public Libraries are open for 137,674 hours annually.

# Accessibility

The public were asked to consider what barriers exist to using the public library in Nova Scotia. Low literacy skills, lack of accessibility, bad past experiences in a library, and distance from the library all were mentioned. It was noted that not all public libraries in Nova Scotia were physically accessible and that some library buildings were outdated. The public stressed the importance of the mobile library and books by mail services in reaching rural library users and library users who were unable to travel to a library. Visually impaired users stressed the importance of inclusivity in library services.

**"We need assistance to select our books."**

*- Sydney, Cape Breton Regional Library visually impaired user*

## *What Happens Now?*

As the consultations around the province were taking place, public library regions began responding in many ways. Senior staff took the results from their region to their boards to discuss possibilities for change. Regional libraries began to investigate ways to make their services more accessible. At the Provincial Library, the consultation results have informed goals in the Strategic Plan. Development of an accessibility strategy, updated library benchmarks for service, particularly in the realm of open hours and collections development is planned. The input from the public about library buildings will be useful to all regions who are refurbishing, renovating, or planning new buildings.

The responses to the questions from around the province are available at [www.library.ns.ca](http://www.library.ns.ca). As changes in library services evolve as a result of the consultations, this news will be posted on the Provincial Library website.

Nova Scotians used public access computers in public libraries for 561,441 hours in 2005-06.

# Nova Scotia's Award-Winning Public Libraries

## Cape Breton Regional Library

2001 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award for 'The McLennans of Petersfield', an online history of the contributions of the McLennan family to the community of Cape Breton

2001 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award for LeughSeo (Gaelic/English Catalogue)

## Halifax Public Libraries

1997 Canadian Library Association Award for Achievement in Technical Service. For Technical Services and Systems Management Project

1999 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award. Innovative use of the internet in public libraries.

2001-02 LAMA (Library Administration and Management Association) PMRS Best of Show Award. For library website launch promotion

2002 United Way Quantum Leap Award. For Exceptional Workplace Campaign Achievement

2002 Lieutenant Governor's Award for Architecture. For design of Keshen Goodman Public Library

2002 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award. For E-Branch initiative

2003 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award. For IT skills project

2002-03 American Library Association John Cotton Dana Award for Outstanding Public Relations. For Summer Reading Club

2003-04 LAMA PMRS Best of Show Award Honourable Mention. For Summer Reading Quest logbook

2003-04 American Library Association John Cotton Dana Award for Outstanding Public Relations. For Summer Reading Quest

2006 IWK Community Service Award. Awarded to Heather MacKenzie for her dedication to the Read to Me program

APLA 2006 Ideas Gallery Award Winner in recognition of innovative public relations for "Black Nova Scotians in the Arts Bookmarks"

## Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library

2001 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award. For Connecting Canadians project

2002 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award. For Search and Win Contest

2003 Industry Canada LibraryNet Best Practices Award Library Net Best Practices Awards. For Business Room project

2001 Random House of Canada Friends of the Year Award. River John Friends of the Library

2001- 2002 Peggy Hiscock, Linda Arsenault, Karen MacNeill, and Eric Stackhouse were awarded Commanding Officer "H" Division RCMP Certificates of Appreciation for their continued support and dedication to Pictou County RCMP

2002 Fred Popowich won a NS Provincial Government Literacy Award for his commitment to literacy activities

2002 Pictou County Chamber of Commerce Technology Achievement Award. Awarded to Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library, sponsored by Information Technology Action Group (ITAG) and MTT

2002 Canada Post Literacy Award. Adopt a Library Literacy Program

2006 Eric Stackhouse and Susan MacDonald won awards through the Adopt a Library Literacy Program for their continued support and commitment

2006 Community in Bloom Award. New Glasgow Library won a certificate of merit for fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility, and beautification in New Glasgow

## South Shore Regional Library

APLA 2006 Ideas Gallery. South Shore Regional Library public relations materials won awards in both the Library Advocacy and Fundraising categories

## Western Counties Regional Library

2002 W. Kaye Lamb Award for Service to Seniors. Given by the Canadian Library Association and Ex Libris Association

2003 Industry Canada's LibraryNet Best Practices Award. For Study Smart project

2002 Louis Braille Certificate of Merit . Awarded by NS CNIB for services to the visually impaired

2002 Canadian Association of Public Libraries Outstanding Public Library Service award "In recognition of her positive lasting impact on public library service in Canada" - Trudy Amirault

2003 South West Nova Community Access Society, IT Entrepreneur of the Year. Awarded to Trudy Amirault for achievement in South Western Nova Scotia

2004 Nova Scotia Library Association Award of Merit. Awarded to Virginia Stoddard

