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# Kootenay Library Federation Environmental Scan

A review of the landscape and context  
facing public library services in the Kootenay region

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## INTRODUCTION

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There are 19 member libraries within the Kootenay Library Federation (KLF). Each library has a volunteer board of trustees and one trustee from each member board is appointed to the KLF board. One library director from each library sits on the Library Director's Advisory Group (LDAG). This group acts as an advisory group to the KLF Board and staff.

This environmental scan was completed during September and October, 2014. The purpose of this scan is to provide the KLF community with information and context to support the development of its 2015-2018 strategic plan. To maintain a manageable report length, this scan provides the highlights and key findings from the following sources:

- Results of a four online surveys (library directors and staff, local government officials and staff, library trustees, and library volunteers)
- Key informant interviews
- KLF member statistics, and
- A summary of KLF member strategic plans.

The responses to survey questions requiring text responses have been compiled into a separate Environmental Scan Appendix.

## OUR REGION

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The nineteen member libraries of the KLF provide services to approximately 146,000 residents within a geographical area of nearly 60,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This region is rich in natural beauty with several mountain ranges, river valleys and lakes. While beautiful, the rugged terrain of this region combined with heavy snowfall can make road travel within the region difficult during the winter months.

The four largest communities in the region (Cranbrook, Nelson, Castlegar and Trail) are home to nearly one-third of the region's residents. Over the past few years, the further (?) development of mining in the East Kootenay has increased the population of smaller communities, brought high paying jobs and, in some cases, brought foreign workers to help fill vacancies. Mountain communities in the Columbia Valley, Fernie, Rossland and Nelson have also seen growth through "amenity migration", as people are choosing to live and work closer to where they can play. Residents living in the East Kootenay communities are slightly younger (median age 44.5 years) than residents living in the West Kootenay (47.4 years) and Boundary (49.6 years).

## RESULTS

### Online Survey – Key Findings

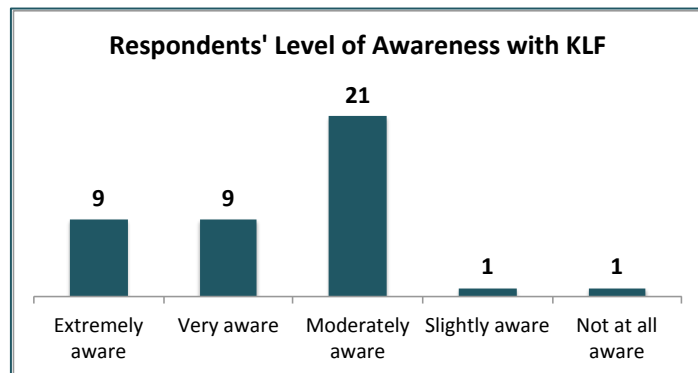
Survey questions were developed with the input of Joanne Richards, the KLF Coordinator, two library directors, and members of the KLF Board Strategic Planning Sub-Committee. Fluid Surveys was the survey tool chosen ([www.fluidsurveys.com](http://www.fluidsurveys.com)) and the survey was launched on September 17, 2014. Each of the four surveys had a distinct URL and library directors were requested to forward the links to library directors and staff, local government and staff, trustees, and volunteers. The closing date for the survey was October 6<sup>th</sup> for all groups with the exception of the local government survey, which closed on October 8<sup>th</sup>. There were a total of 206 surveys returned as

- 41 library directors and staff
- 30 Local Government & Staff
- 51 Trustees
- 84 volunteers

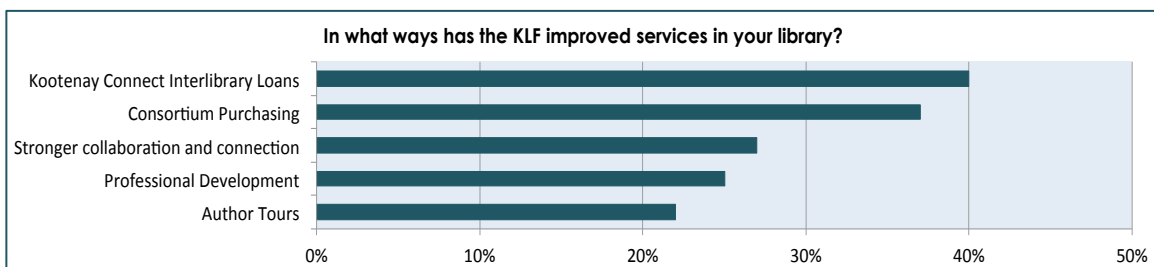
The following section provides highlights of survey findings from these four groups of respondents.

#### 1. Library Directors and Staff Survey

Of the 41 respondents to this survey, 10 were library directors and 31 were staff. According to the graph on the right, there are **varying levels of awareness of the KLF, its purpose and activities.**



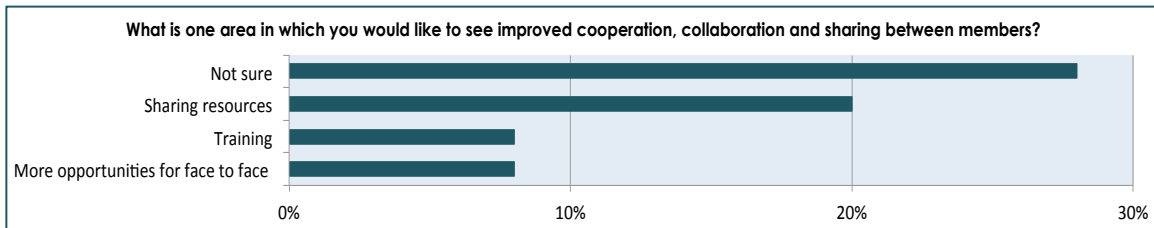
Respondents feel that **KLF has improved services in their libraries, most notably in the following ways:**



Respondents identified the following challenges as the ones in which **the KLF could be most helpful to them:**

- Professional development (29%)
- Communication, resource sharing (11%)
- Support for service promotion (11%)
- Advancing technology (7%)

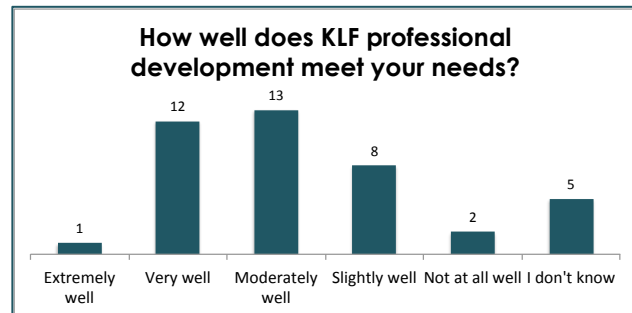
Over the past three years, just over half of respondents (56%) feel that **member collaboration and cooperation** went very or extremely well and 20% felt it went moderately well. Nearly one-quarter of respondents did not know. The following chart reveals the areas in which respondents would like to see **improvements in member cooperation and collaboration.**



There are varying levels of willingness to take on additional tasks that could strengthen member collaboration. For example, four respondents are extremely willing to take on additional tasks, 11 are very willing and 16 respondents are moderately willing.

British Columbia libraries are navigating rapid changes to service delivery. One quarter of respondents feel that **providing professional development is one way in which the KLF can support** them in managing rapid changes. One quarter of respondents are unsure how the KLF can help them in their library service delivery.

The chart on the right indicates the number of respondents who rated **how well KLF professional development meets their needs.**



**Library directors and staff offer the following advice to the KLF** as they embark on their strategic planning.

- Shifting Ministry priorities mean we must constantly re-assess our goals and direction. Make the plan broad and overarching around the need to respond to community libraries.
- Be willing to try new things.
- Provide more in-depth courses for professional development.

- With the demise of the Community Librarian's Training, the KLF should assist libraries with continuing education as much as possible.
- Continue with One Book One Kootenay (OBOK) and the book club sets.
- Keep it flexible.
- Don't make the system more complicated than it needs to be. It's working great so far, so don't change too much!
- Keep it simple.
- Keep the goals realistic.
- Keep up the good work (x3)
- Speak directly to staff - to the people doing the work with the public.

## 2. Local Government and Staff

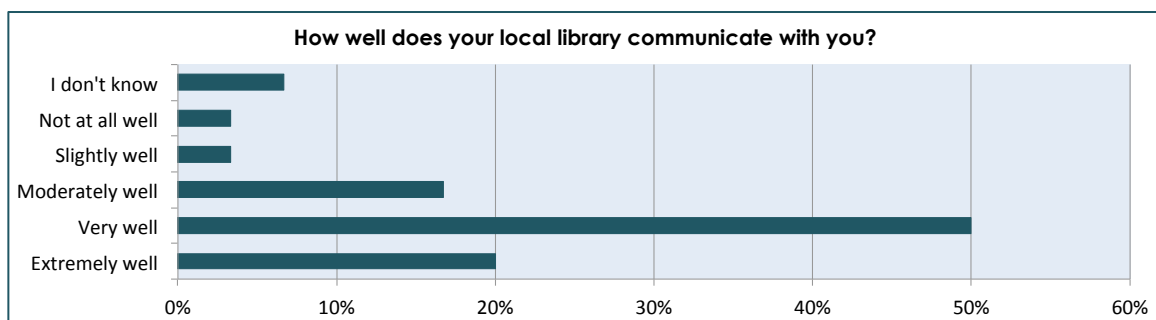
The 30 responses to this survey represented 11 of the 19 communities within the KLF region. Of the 30 respondents, 18 identified as local government officials and 10 identified as local government staff. The highest response rate came from Cranbrook (7), followed by Nelson (5), Invermere (4) and Greenwood (3).

Most respondents (63%) are aware that as part of a provincial shared service, their library offers 24/7 access to information databases, e-books and audiobooks through its online catalogue.

Respondents identified the following **current community issues** as being things their libraries could help to address:

- Provision of quality, accessible Internet services (12%)
- Improving literacy levels (12%)
- Need for a community-gathering place (8%)
- Supporting the learning about new technology (8%)

The majority of respondents feel that **their local libraries communicate well with them.**



Though generally very pleased with their library’s communication, respondents offered several ways in which their **libraries could improve communication** with them:

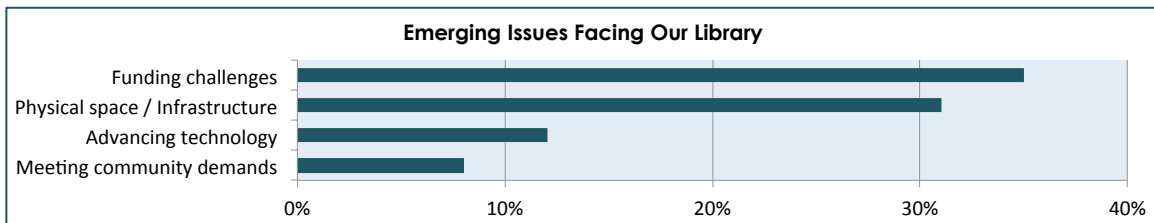
- Regular verbal or newsletter updates (23%)
- Social media (11%)
- Email or texting (11%)
- Annual meeting with municipal councils (11%)

When asked for any final comments, nearly **70% of respondents commented that their local library is a tremendous community resource.**

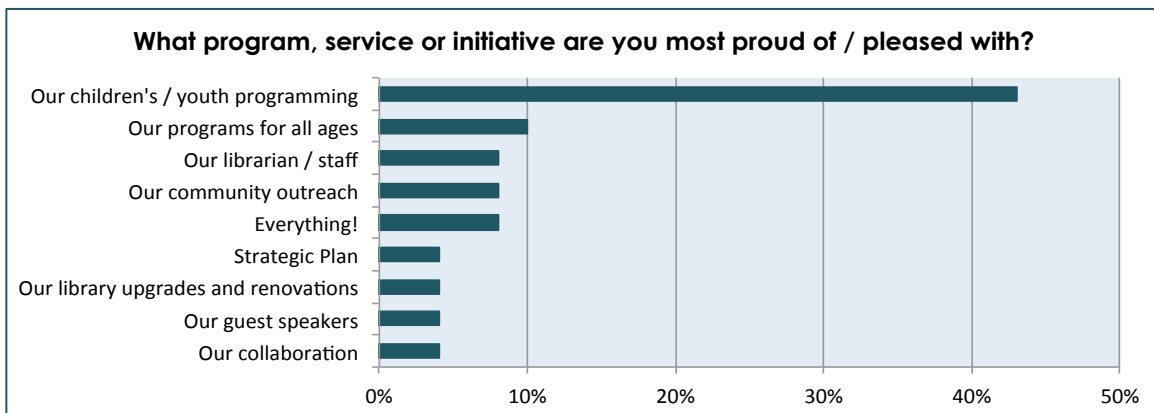
### 3. Library Board Trustees

Fifty-one trustees replied to the survey representing 18 of the 19 member libraries. The highest response rate came from Fernie (8), followed by Invermere (5) and Trail, Nelson, Creston and Castlegar (each with 4). About **20% of trustees are new to their board**, having served one year or less. Nearly 40% of trustees have been on their board for 2-3 years, and 42% have been on their boards for four years or longer.

According to trustees, there are two main issues emerging for their community libraries. The **first issue is funding, followed by inadequate library space and/or infrastructure.**



By wide margins, **trustees are most proud of their library’s children’s programming**, as evidenced by the following graph.



Seventy percent of trustees are moderately, very or extremely aware of the KLF, its purpose and activities. Twenty percent of trustees were slightly aware of the KLF.

When asked about KLF member collaboration and cooperation over the past three years, **41% of trustees feel that KLF members collaborated and cooperated either very well or extremely well.** Forty one percent of trustees did not know.

One-third of trustees identified **resource, information, and idea sharing** as the main area they would like to see improved cooperation and collaboration between members. Twenty eight percent of trustees could not identify an area for improvement.

The majority of trustees (54%) feel that the **KLF is either extremely (4%), very (21%), or moderately (29%) effective** in supporting their library’s advocacy efforts.

Overall, the **majority of trustees are confident in their library board skills.** For example:

- 4% feel extremely confident
- 39% feel very confident
- 51% feel moderately confident
- 6% feel slightly confident

When asked about their board development training, respondents reported that **board training meets their needs either moderately well (43%), very well (39%) or extremely well (4%).**

Three trustees (6%) reported that board training does not meet their needs at all well.

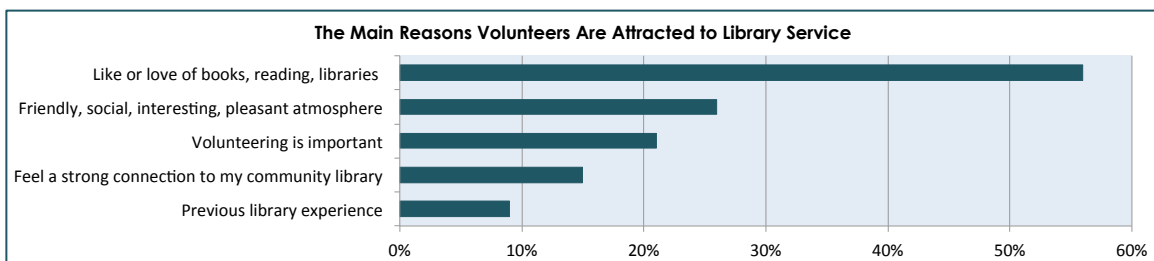
Trustees offered the following **advice to the KLF as they embark on their strategic plan:**

- Strengthen communication, collaboration, coordination and resource sharing (34%)
- Develop new ideas to promote / advocate for libraries (21%)
- Develop a simple, concise, realistic yet flexible strategic plan (18%)

#### 4. Library Volunteers

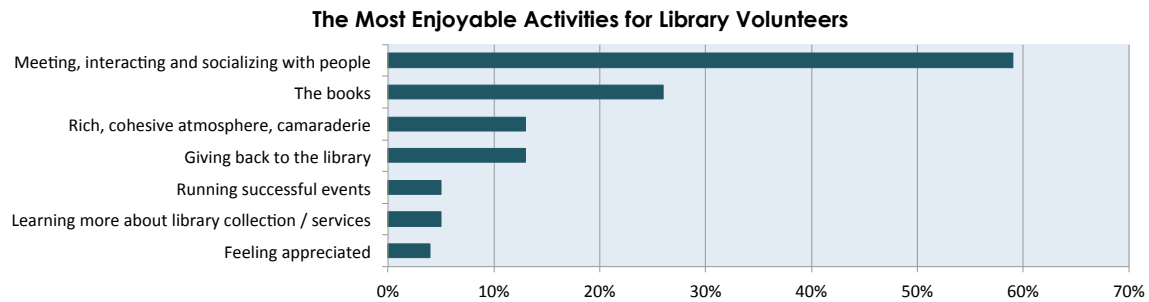
Eighty-four volunteers (including Friends of the Library) offered responses to the survey, representing 11 of the 19 member libraries. The greatest number of responses came from Creston (19), followed by Nakusp (14), Castlegar (12), Kimberley (10) and Invermere (8).

Volunteers are attracted to library service primarily because **they love books, reading and libraries.** Some other reasons why volunteers engage in library service include:





Library volunteers most enjoy **meeting, interacting and socializing with people**.



Volunteers within the KLF membership are **highly satisfied with their volunteer experience**. In fact, **63% reported not needing anything to improve their volunteer experience**. Of the suggestions that were received, the following were the most frequent:

- Provide more training so I can better help clients (7%)
- Increase the number of volunteers (6%)
- Provide more space for the library (5%)
- Better inform me about changes in programs, policies, etc. (5%)

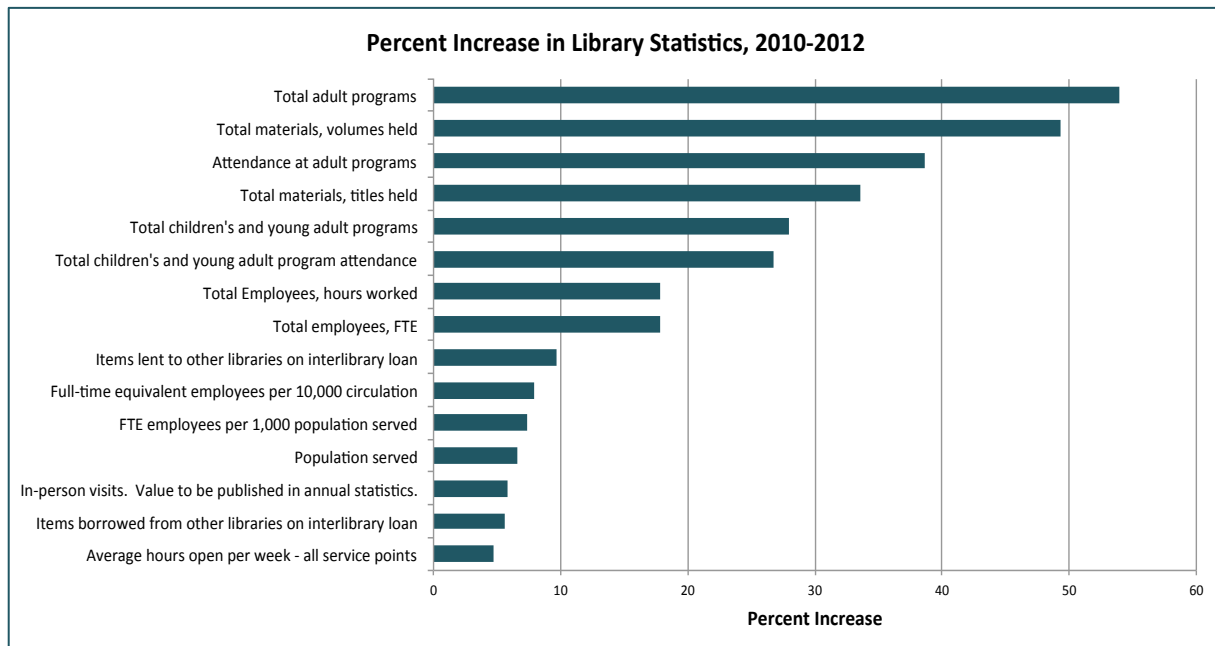
Just over half of volunteers (54%) feel that **advancing technology is the biggest issue facing their library in the next ten years**. Additional issues brought forward include:

- The need for additional physical space / renovations in their library (26%)
- Funding shortfalls (23%)
- Continuing to engage the public (20%)

## Member Statistics – Key Findings

An analysis of library statistics was completed for the period 2010 through 2012. The following points represent key findings:

- There was a 6.6% increase in the population served by the 19 member libraries.
  - There was a 21% drop in the total active cardholders as a % of population served.
- There was an increase of 34% in the total number of titles held.
- There were just over 46,000 additional in-person visits between 2010 and 2012.
- There was an increase of 1100 items borrowed from other libraries on ILL.
- There was an increase of nearly 1600 items lent to other libraries on ILL.
- Between 2010-2012, the number of adult programs grew by 449 (54% increase).
- Children’s programming grew by 28% between 2010-2012 (an increase of 629 programs).
- There was an increase of nearly 23,000 employee hours worked (18% increase).



**As well, between 2010 and 2012...**

- There was a 4% decrease in circulation per capita.
- There was a 5% decrease in volunteer hours worked and volunteer FTEs.
- There was a 7% decrease (75,000) in circulation of all materials.
- There were 7200 fewer cardholders at the end of the year in 2012 vs. 2010 (12% decrease)

**Stakeholder Interviews – Key Findings**

During the month of September, seven interviews were conducted with key informants from KLF member libraries, three library federations, the Ministry of Education, and BC Libraries Cooperative. Their responses have been summarized into the following key themes.

**1. What is Working Well?**

Without a doubt, there is a strong commitment to public libraries in this region. People have powerful connections to libraries and one interviewee referred to them as “cornerstones of democracy”. There are very few free public gathering spaces left and libraries offer community members “open doors”, warmth and safety. This is especially true for vulnerable people. Small libraries are nimble and adaptive, and there has been a growth in the sharing of resources and programming between members over the past several years. The KLF

(KLF and members) are “amazing, giving, open and sharing people.”  
Key informant

is viewed as an organization that sees the big picture, has the capacity to strengthen library services and plays a key role in coordination, professional development and support to its members.

## 2. Where are the Issues or Challenges Emerging?

### a) Technology

Libraries are challenged to keep pace with rapid technological change. Patrons look to libraries for help with their devices and staff struggle to have the resources and skills to help everyone. Some library staff are resistant to change, particularly in the area of technology, which can create friction between staff. In this climate of change, staff find themselves struggling with how to maintain their library's relevance in the face of advancing technology. This is an area with a growing demand for professional development.

"We aren't skilled enough with some technology issues."

Key informant

### b) Library Boards

Library boards, as with most voluntary boards, are composed of busy people who feel a deep sense of connection to their communities. Volunteer board members; including library trustees are typically retired adults. With the changing face of libraries, the input of younger people is felt to be very important and sometimes missing. Due to busy schedules, lack of confidence or skill in the trustee role, some library boards lack the capacity to take work on. Fundraising was an example of board work that library directors could use more board support with. According to one director, even when training is offered some trustees who could really use it don't sign up. Some library directors are left feeling challenged with knowing how much to expect from their boards. As it is within directors' nature to be efficient and organized, one director asked "Do I do too much and let them off the hook?" Another issue brought forward is the lack of succession planning underway for Executive positions and library directors' positions as well as the need for ongoing recruitment and retention of trustees.

### c) Library Culture

Libraries operate within an environment of constant change. Some patrons demand legacy services including the physical browsing of books, and growing numbers demand services that keep pace with advancing technology. All of the interviewees commented that libraries are challenged with knowing how to maintain relevance to their communities and to provide everything communities want.

"The culture of libraries is to say "yes"."

Key Informant

Libraries are filled with dedicated and resourceful staff. The culture of libraries is to say “yes” and more often than not, they continue doing more with less. Some interviewees feel that this may be a generational thing, as well as a lack of confidence to say “no”. In some cases library leaders don’t exert limits upon staff who feel obliged to take more on. Rather than continuing with these same patterns, several interviewees expressed encouragement for libraries to step away from “business as usual.”

#### d) Staff Capacity and Training

- **Loss of the Long-Standing Provincial Supports**


Following a three-year provincial review, the Community Library Training Program was cancelled in August 2014. There were concerns that the program wasn’t keeping pace with library technology, had limitations in who could access it, and was of little benefit to mid-career professionals. Recognizing that this program was popular in rural areas, the Ministry of Education wants to expand the audience to academics, school librarians, and others. In addition to this training program, there have been cuts to the provincial librarians who provided support and resources.

- **KLF Training Doesn’t Meet the Needs of Everyone**

Training and professional development is a key deliverable for every Library Federation in BC. And survey respondents reported that professional development is one of the biggest supports the KLF provides them. Yet meeting the training and learning needs of all KLF members is challenging. Some KLF members would prefer in-person training (which is challenging and costly to deliver) and some want online modules that they can take on demand. Trustees are busy volunteers and don’t automatically access training even when offered in their own community.

- **Skill Sets**

In rural workplaces of all kinds, securing employees with appropriate skill sets is a challenge. This holds true in libraries. In some situations, library staff are hired without formal library education. According to some interviewees, staff may be hired for their skills and attitude in working with the public but may not be particularly skilled in time management, project management or Excel. There is concern that there is not the right mix of staff and skills to support libraries in keeping pace with technological change.



“It’s hard to get people with masters’ degrees in small communities.”

#### e) Inadequate and Unknown Funding

The provincial government is the sole funder for the KLF. The current funding climate makes it difficult to plan with confidence. A challenge facing Library Federations is that the expectations from the provincial funders are high and often contrary to the direction of members.

#### f) Member Engagement

Despite the fact that libraries are operating in a constantly changing environment, there is agreement amongst interviewees that no library is unique in its issues. There is a strong belief that difficult times should make people pull together more, not less. People may feel that libraries are collaborative, but some respondents reported that the daily busyness of library service doesn't necessarily foster collaboration. According to several interviewees, there is a need to make people feel it is important to be involved. One interviewee asked, "If there wasn't a Federation, how would members function differently?"

During the course of the interviews with key informants, **several reasons have emerged as to why all KLF members are not fully engaged:**

- There is considerable cost and time required to travel to meetings
- The geography of the Kootenay region makes travel difficult
- Given that the KLF has no power and a limited voice, some members feel there isn't much benefit to participating.
- People get busy and see collaboration as "just one more thing to do."
- Some library directors don't feel as invested in Federations as they did with associations.
- Some members may see the KLF as an extra hand of the province
- There may be fear among some library directors that if they get too reliant on the Federation then they will be on the hook if the province decides to reduce funding.
- Some members may feel that they will lose their autonomy and be required to do the same things as other members (or do what the KLF tells them to do).
- Some feel the challenge is HOW members get together. Some feel that teleconferencing isn't suitable for collaboration as it is easier to not say anything while on a teleconference.

### 3. Positioning Libraries for the Future

#### a) Strengthen Relationships

In order to influence decision-making, libraries need to focus on building meaningful relationships with leaders and funders. According to one interviewee, "Mature library systems will be involved with community leaders to shape decision-making." As part of their advocacy role, interviewees feel that the KLF could support members in building connections with community leaders. If libraries are to provide the services their communities want, then they also need to engage with communities to determine their priorities. One interviewee feels it is important to identify needs in the community, build capacity in the library staff, then reach out to partners. One interviewee recommends that Federations focus on relationship building, supporting the flow of communication, giving out what they would like to receive back, and providing the safe space to be heard and to speak.

## b) Survive or Thrive

Interviewees feel strongly that library services are going to have to change to survive. The following points represent some suggestions:

- Evaluate programs and focus efforts on delivering the most successful ones.
- Showcase how libraries are making a difference in communities.
- Identify library systems that have developed strong relationships with funders and learn from them.
- Look at future trends and ways to be innovative.
- Have a big leap of faith to move forward and have your library board onside too.
- What do we have to do now so we're in a good place in 2-5 years?

“The more innovative and interwoven in the community the library is, the stronger they will be.”

Key Informant

## 4. Advice For Strategic Planning

- Aim high. Don't over compromise.
- Set realistic expectations. Develop a plan that can be easily altered as needs change.
- Align KLF goals with what the province is expecting.
- Be aware of what the provincial priorities are (collaboration, sharing, cross sectoral), but not have your strategic plan rely solely on these provincial priorities. We have to be clearly aligned with what levels of government are willing to fund.
- Encourage federations to collaborate on training and professional development.
- Engage and consult fully with stakeholders in this process. Listen very well to boards and listen to directors who are working very hard.
- Every strategic planning goal should have a partnership aspect to it.

## Members' Strategic Plans – Key Findings

Kootenay Library Federation members were asked to share their strategic plans for the purposes of preparing this landscape report. Of the 19 member libraries, 14 libraries provided their strategic plans representing small, medium and large sized libraries in the region. A review of these 14 strategic plans reveals distinct similarities in members' key focus areas for the next several years. For example, the most commonly cited key focus area mentioned by 10 libraries is **strengthening relationships and community connections**. The other commonly cited key focus areas include:

- Increasing, modernizing, or renovating physical space and infrastructure (9 libraries)
- Supporting healthy staff and organizations (including volunteers) (7 libraries)

- Improve services and collections, including technology (7 libraries)
- Build community awareness of the library (5 libraries)
- Position the library as a community centre / hub (4 libraries)