

A Team of Champions

Increasing library use through social marketing

Executive Summary

Community support, strategic partnerships, and welcoming and caring staff have been vital to the development and sustainability of the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library's innovative services and projects over the past 20 years. We propose to use these same partnerships and staff to grow library usage among non-library members. Increased usage and knowledgeable partners will help ensure a sustainable future for the regional library and allow us to continue to foster innovation in our community responsive library service.

Business/Organizational Profile

Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL) offers a "layered" approach to services:

- 7 branch libraries (two have won national awards) with efficient services and programming.
- Virtual service through www.parl.ns.ca and www.novastory.ca.
- Books by Mail Program and outreach service for rural areas and organizations.
- Community technology program across the two county area including non-library sites.

We serve a combined population of approximately 66,000 people. The stated mission of PARL is "*to meet the informational, educational, recreational and cultural needs of the public and to co-operate with other community groups and agencies involved in meeting those needs*". The Board is comprised of 10 representatives, 1 from each of our 8 municipalities and 2 appointed by the Province of Nova Scotia.

It is through our partnerships and community-oriented board and staff members that PARL has succeeded in developing innovative services, such as our Newcomer Welcome Initiative, recently showcased in the *Culture Action Plan*.

Description of Project

In 2017, the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library engaged a student in Cape Breton University's Masters of Business Administration in Community Development program to research, carry out focus groups, and report on the most effective way of increasing library usage.

It is the Board's policy to encourage maximum use of the library service by the citizens of the Pictou-Antigonish area. The number of users has held steady for several years. Approximately 32% of population are active users**, placing PARL second across the province as compared to other regional libraries. While "good" in comparison, PARL wishes to raise this number, and other metrics, within the next few years. PARL believes increasing usage will help ensure a sustainable financial future with community sponsors and government funders at all levels.

** An 'active user' is defined as a person who has used their library card within three years. This is a provincial standard.

The approach of this proposal is unique. It proposes enlisting the library's current community partners to unite as library champions to promote awareness of, and facilitate access to, the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library collections, services, and programs. A community-driven approach is not new to PARL, as staff and board have a tradition of engaging with community partners in service and program development. This campaign differs in that PARL will be asking community partners to help reach those individuals (from among their audience) who are currently not visiting the library or making full use of library offerings.

In addition, as responsive institutions, public libraries should seek to reflect the concerns and values of the populations they serve. By increasing users via our community partners, PARL can glean better insight into the needs and wants of the entire community and make informed development strategies.

Finally, this proposal also recognizes the crucial role of library staff as the main contact point for the public and community organizations and seeks to ensure consistent service delivery and alignment with overall library philosophies. This will ensure the people directed to the library by partners will stay connected for the long term.

Strategic goal: Through engagement with a higher number of users, and by building strong partnerships with groups, agencies, and businesses, PARL will continue to support a sustainable future. We know from experience these are the keys to our success with local government and community sponsors in terms of funding.

Project goal: To grow library usage among non-library members, by 10%, over 24 months. We will use a number of metrics to gain a comprehensive evaluation.

Project activities:

- **Grow** usage by engaging our many existing partners to act as advocates for libraries and to aim their clients to our services.
- **Hold** new users by training library front line staff in customized first contact skills and by ensuring an optimum experience for visits.
- **Measure** progress through a variety of metrics, including highly accurate membership, gate, program attendance, and referral counts.
- **Ensure** a sustainable practical plan is left in place to continue partnership engagement and staff training after the project finishes.
- **Report**, including a replicable plan to be used by other regional libraries.

Key components:

- Two year contracted project coordinator with excellent organization and communications skills capable of engaging dozens of partners. This position would not continue past the project end date and responsibilities would be merged with existing staff.
- Staff training. We will work with the local CBDC and their partnership with Labour and Advanced Education and others to develop a workshop for front line staff in public engagement skills. Most of the library front line staff are part-time, therefore a cost is incurred in any training.
- Planned partner events such as “lunch and learn”, focus groups sessions, etc.
- Promotional materials.
- Software and hardware for gathering and reporting of metrics as well as communicating with partners and users.

Critical Path

This is a two-year project beginning in October 2018.

- October to January 2019 will be for hiring of the project coordinator, setup, and planning.
- Activities and training will be underway in January 2019.
- A mid-project report will be prepared for October 2019.
- A final report with plan for sustainably continuing within regional library means will be prepared for September 2020.