

Summative Evaluation: Initiative for Equitable Library Access

Final Report

Evaluation Function
Audit and Evaluation Directorate

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Executive Summary

The Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA) was announced in 2007 and was an exploratory, limited-term initiative funded with a budget of \$3 million over three years. It was designed with the objective to create the conditions for sustainable and equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities. It was structured around five workstreams which corresponded with issues raised in the 2005 report, *Opening the Book*. At the end of the third year, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) was to report back to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, with a national strategy and costing, as well as other recommendations for consideration. Early in 2009–2010, a review of the progress achieved to date was conducted and it was determined that the Initiative was not on track to achieve its intended goals within the specified timeframe and budget. At that point, efforts were directed to focus on the fifth workstream—developing a national strategy and business case. Later, when it became apparent that a consensus could not be reached, the decision was taken to end the Initiative and \$1.5 million was returned to the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF).

The focus of the evaluation was on the relevance of the Initiative, its effectiveness and the lessons learned. Based on two lines of evidence, a document and file review, and key informant interviews, the evaluation concludes that:

- The original design of IELA was aligned with the priorities of the Government of Canada, the needs of Canadians with print disabilities, and was broadly consistent with LAC priorities; however, over time its relevance diminished due to changes in the external environment.
- Alternative models and implementation strategies were not considered at the design stage of the Initiative which resulted in overly ambitious goals and generated high expectations from stakeholders.
- The Initiative would have benefitted from a more consistent management oversight in its early stages.

A number of important lessons were learned through LAC's involvement in the IELA.

Relevance

1. In future, LAC should examine closely its involvement in new initiatives to ensure that they are better integrated within its core business.

Effectiveness

2. In cases where an initiative is exploratory and future funding is not yet secured, LAC should be clear about available funding from the start and actively engage potential partners in discussions around sustainability.
3. Close management oversight is required for all initiatives, whether limited-term or permanent, to ensure that intended objectives remain achievable.
4. If it is determined that an initiative overlaps other federal departmental jurisdictions, consultations should take place to determine how to implement a horizontal approach.
5. It is important to consider the rapid evolution of technology and how new innovations may have an impact on the issues being addressed in a project or initiative.

Management Response

LAC's management recognizes the evaluation of IELA as an important point of reference for the institution's forward planning and operational functions, particularly in the context of resource sustainability, horizontal collaboration, management best-practices, technological innovation, and the commitment to core business.

Lessons learned through IELA will assist LAC going forward. IELA also has informed LAC's approach to ongoing operations, as the initiative foregrounded access for persons with print disabilities as a key consideration in day-to-day service offerings. On site, LAC continues to provide workstations for clients with visual impairment, including screen enlargers, Braille keyboards, and accessibility software. Online, LAC maintains the National Union Catalogue, which includes alternate format holdings of libraries across the country, including over 210,000 Braille titles, over 200,000 sound recordings, over 600,000 large print titles, and over 1 million electronic texts, many of which are directly accessible online.

LAC recognizes the digital environment as having the greatest potential to provide Canadians with the broadest possible access to their documentary heritage. In order to leverage that potential, LAC continues to evolve its service model toward online and digital service channels, and will explore how to take advantage of digital and new technologies to meet the needs of Canadians with print disabilities. With the emergence of technological solutions not previously available during the tenure of IELA, LAC will seek to improve ease of access for all Canadians. The evaluation of IELA will provide additional context for this ongoing service evolution.

1. Introduction

Overview of the Report

The evaluation of the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA) was undertaken by the Evaluation Function of the Audit and Evaluation Directorate within Library and Archives Canada (LAC) with the assistance of the consulting firm T.K. Gussman Associates Inc. The following areas were the focus for the evaluation:

- relevance
- effectiveness
- lessons learned

The report provides a profile of the IELA, including the events leading to its launch, an overview of its objectives and a summary of financial resources as planned and expended. The evaluation's methodology is summarized in Section 2 and observations are presented, by evaluation issue, in Section 3. Section 4 contains the lessons learned from the findings of the previous sections.

Profile of the IELA

Context

Print disabilities prevent people from reading standard print due to a visual, perceptual or physical disability, which limits their ability to participate fully in the workplace, in learning and in the community. As of 2006, over three million Canadians were identified as having some form of print disability. Canadians with print disabilities require published material in multiple formats (MMFs) such as Braille, audio and electronic text as well as adaptive electronic technology. At that time, however, only five percent of published material was available in multiple formats.¹

History

As early as 1976, the former National Library of Canada's Task Group on Library Service to the Handicapped acknowledged that library services for Canadians with disabilities were inadequate. In 2000, a joint National Library of Canada and Canadian National Institute for the Blind (now legally named CNIB) Task Force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians released a task force report (*Fulfilling the Promise*)², which included a series of 24 recommendations for

¹ [LAC's IELA website](#)

² [Task Force to National Librarian and to CNIB. Fulfilling the Promise. January 2000.](#)

service enhancement. In response to these recommendations, the National Librarian established the Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians (the Council) in 2001 to provide expert advice on issues of equitable library access.

The Council, under the aegis of the Canadian Library Association (CLA), created a nationwide Working Group to define the scope of a National Network for Equitable Library Service for Canadians with print disabilities, chaired by LAC. The CLA Working Group drew attention to these issues in its 2005 report, *Opening the Book*, which presented a vision for a national network comprised of service libraries, a national coordinating office within the federal government, and various production centres for alternate format materials. With the release of *Opening the Book*, CLA also received federal funding through Social Development Canada (SDC) for the Electronic Clearinghouse for Alternative Format Production Pilot Project. This was a collaborative project that made use of LAC infrastructure to test means to facilitate production of alternate format material by making publisher e-files available to producers.

The 2005 budget announced funding for Canadians with print disabilities in the form of a one-time grant of \$6 million to CNIB for the digitization of its collections and an additional \$1 million on-going funding to extend library services to Canadians across the country.³

In 2006, CNIB received the \$6 million federal grant, whereas LAC's funding did not go forward until 2007. Instead, the government approved limited-term funding of \$3 million for a national initiative to improve access to information in multiple formats and to develop a strategy that supports equitable library service for Canadians with print disabilities, at the rate of \$1 million annually over three fiscal years (2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010). The IELA was announced formally in October 2007.⁴

Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The mandate of IELA was to create the conditions for sustainable and equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities.

The Initiative was structured around the following five “workstreams” which responded to issues raised in the 2005 report, *Opening the Book*:

1. Introduce new service standards in support of equitable library access

³ [Budget Plan 2005](#), page 99

⁴ [LAC press release](#), dated October 2, 2007

2. Develop and launch an Internet Portal for materials in multiple formats (MMFs)
3. Secure the participation of publishers and producers of MMFs in efforts to strengthen equitable access
4. Develop an electronic clearinghouse linking publishers and producers of MMFs.
5. Develop a nation-wide strategy to provide equitable library access to Canadians with print disabilities

According to program documentation, activities in the fifth workstream were to be undertaken during the first 18 months of the Initiative with the remaining time dedicated to stakeholder consultation and consensus building. Activities in the other workstreams were to serve as input to the national strategy and continue over the entire three-year IELA mandate. At the end of 2009–2010, LAC was expected to bring forward a national strategy and costing options, as well as other recommendations.

Financial Resources

As a result of receiving funding partway through the 2007–2008 fiscal year, only \$302,190 was expended. Work continued in 2008–2009 according to the workstreams that had been approved. Early in 2009–2010, a careful review of the Initiative was undertaken. This review determined that IELA was not on track to achieve its intended objectives, within the time frame and budget. For this reason, the IELA was directed by LAC senior management to concentrate on building consensus around the fifth workstream—developing a national strategy and business case. At the same time, work on other workstreams stopped. In fiscal year 2010–2011, with no consensus on a way forward having been reached, a decision was taken to terminate the Initiative, and unexpended funding of \$1.5 million was returned to the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF).

Table 1 summarizes actual expenditures.

Table 1: IELA Expenditures (\$)

Federal Costs	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010	Total	Returned to CRF
Salaries	176,331	334,091	45,998	556,420	
Employee Benefits	35,266	66,818	9,200	111,284	
Operating & Maintenance (O&M)	67,670	450,602	238,610	756,882	
PWGSC Accommodations	22,923	43,432	5,980	72,335	
Total Costs	302,190	894,943	299,788	1,496,921	1,503,079

Source: LAC administrative data

Key Stakeholders

The IELA included consideration of issues and consultations with a wide platform of jurisdictions including international, national, provincial/territorial and municipal governments and institutions. Organizations at the international level oversee numerous issues including human rights (UNESCO), copyright (World Intellectual Property Organization – WIPO), standards (Daisy Consortium) and other matters that would have a bearing on IELA activities and results. Key stakeholders within the Government of Canada included Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), Industry Canada (IC), Canadian Heritage (PCH) and others, in addition to LAC. Provincial/territorial/municipal governments are responsible for libraries and education within their respective jurisdictions. Dialogue with provincial and territorial stakeholders has taken place through the Provincial Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC). Non-governmental stakeholders included a broad number of libraries and library associations (e.g., CLA), charitable organizations (e.g., CNIB), education associations, producers of assistive devices, publishers, and persons with print disabilities and various organizations representing their interests.

2. Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation Context, Scope and Limitations

A summative evaluation of the IELA's activities was to be conducted at the end of the Initiative as part of LAC's routine evaluation processes. Because the IELA was an exploratory, limited-term initiative, a performance measurement framework was considered premature and, therefore, was not established at the start of the Initiative.

Since the Initiative was terminated before its completion it was decided that the focus of the evaluation would be on the following issues:

Relevance

- Was the Initiative aligned with the priorities of LAC and the Government of Canada?
- Did the Initiative address the real needs of the target population?

Effectiveness

- Were alternative design and implementation strategies considered and explored?
- What could have been done differently?
- Were there more practical and realistic alternatives?

Lessons Learned

- What are the lessons learned from the experience with the Initiative that could inform future LAC strategies?

Evaluation Method

The findings and conclusions of this evaluation are based on two lines of evidence: a document and file review, and key informant interviews.

Document and File Review

This line of evidence drew on a review of documents and project files. Included, but not limited to the review, were:

- Briefings
- Memoranda
- Minutes of meetings
- Miscellaneous program documentation
- IELA reports
- Websites of LAC and HRSDC and a wide range of other organizations such as CNIB, Canadian Library Association, and the National Educational Association of Disabled Students

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were held with officials involved in the management of the Initiative within LAC. While most of the initial IELA management team had left LAC, the individuals interviewed represented senior management and officials with knowledge of the Initiative. The interviews were conducted during January and February 2012.

The discussion guide for these interviews appears in Annex A.

Limitations

Coverage of the first two years of IELA activities was limited as most of the key officials involved in the early period of the Initiative had left LAC. Views of the key informants about this period were not always consistent with the documentation.

Issues related to efficiency were not considered because the Initiative was not completed.

3. Evaluation Observations

Relevance

The original design of IELA was aligned with the priorities of the Government of Canada, the needs of Canadians with print disabilities, and was broadly consistent with LAC priorities; however, over time its relevance diminished due to changes in the external environment.

Alignment with LAC Priorities

Although the roots of IELA can be found in the efforts by the former National Library and others to advocate on behalf of persons with print disabilities, when the National Library and National Archives merged to form Library and Archives Canada in 2004, the emphasis on providing Canadians with access to their documentary heritage was maintained, as set in the *Library and Archives of Canada Act*, paragraph 7(b): "to make that heritage known to Canadians and to anyone with an interest in Canada and to facilitate access to it." Furthermore, LAC has the objective, as stated under paragraph 7(f) of the Act: "to support the development of the library and archival communities."

As part of its mandate, LAC is a source of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada and facilitates, in Canada, cooperation among communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge. As well, the LAC vision document "Directions for Change" stated several themes including "access is the primary driver," "a clear focus on the client," and "digital is mainstream," that were compatible with IELA. Finally the Initiative was connected to three of the five

corporate priorities of LAC, as stated in its 2007–2008 Report on Plans and Priorities.

Notwithstanding the above, many of the key informants believed that the mandate of IELA was at best weakly aligned with LAC's mandate and core business (i.e. acquisition, preservation and access to documentary heritage).

Alignment with Government of Canada Priorities

Following the policy decision reflected in the 2005 Budget, a limited-term three-year initiative was approved in 2007. Several key informants confirmed their view that IELA was aligned with the Government's broad priorities regarding access to services for all Canadians, with or without disabilities.

Alignment with the Needs of the Target Population

The evaluation found that the program was aligned to the library-service needs of persons with print disabilities as described in several reports going back to the 1970s. Some key informants stated that the design was sound, but conceded that it was overly ambitious. The evaluation found considerable evidence that changes in the external environment have led to improved quality and quantity of digital content and alternative format content. In addition, expanding market penetration has been accompanied by the development of assistive applications (e.g., Dragon voice recognition software). These improvements from advances in information technology hardware and software are available to all Canadians, including those with print disabilities.⁵

Along with these advances came new challenges, especially regarding copyright issues and digital access. In particular, evidence from evaluation interviews highlighted concerns expressed by producers and publishers that access to digital formats by persons with disabilities would be through the self-identification of a print disability, and that this would be insufficient to ensure that these persons qualified for exemptions under the *Copyright Act*.

⁵ Blackberry was introduced in 1999 and there were 70 million subscribers worldwide by October 2011. I-phone was introduced in January 2007 and released in the spring of that year—by the end of fiscal 2010 there were 73.5 million in use. I-pad was introduced January 27, 2010 and there were 55.28 million sold as of December 31, 2011. Such numbers provide an indicator of the rapid technological expansion that has occurred over the past decade and there is no reason to expect the rate of growth to decline.

Effectiveness

Alternative models and implementation strategies were not considered at the design stage of the Initiative, which resulted in overly ambitious goals and generated high expectations from stakeholders.

The evaluation found no evidence to suggest that alternative strategies had been considered at the design stage of the Initiative. The program documentation indicated that the set of concrete deliverables were a direct response to the 2005 report, *Opening the Book*. Notwithstanding that the funding had changed from permanent to limited-term, work proceeded on all four workstreams as well as the development of options and costs for a national strategy (fifth workstream).

Key informants indicated that the design and communication of the Initiative generated high expectations throughout IELEA's various stakeholder communities as well as the perception that work under the Initiative would continue well beyond the three-year time frame and the initial \$3 million investment. In addition, key informants believed that early efforts put insufficient focus on sustainable longer term options and funding implications.

Moreover, potential partners and stakeholders developed the perception that the federal government (LAC) would not only provide leadership on the national strategy but would also be the primary source of funding. In contrast, however, LAC's vision was to be an equal among partners, with decisions around sources of funding to be determined at a later date.

With the introduction of new senior management at LAC in fiscal year 2009–2010 and the review of progress to date complete, the decision was made to focus efforts on the development of a national strategy and building consensus with provinces and territories on options for a governance model across various jurisdictions. At this time, investment was frozen in the other four IELEA workstreams because these activities were not on track to deliver expected results.

Late in 2009, LAC hosted meetings with the Council and the PTPLC. The evaluation found that participants agreed on the multi-jurisdictional nature of providing library services to persons with print disabilities, potential benefits of cost sharing, and the desirability for LAC to explore other potential delivery mechanisms whereby all levels of government could contribute to a national

solution. According to both lines of evidence, the Council and PTPLC members initially agreed to move forward and consider options for cost sharing.

Key informants indicated that other factors in play, however, made it difficult for LAC to lead the development of a cost-shared national strategy with broad endorsement by IELA stakeholders. In early 2010, the CNIB announced its intention to close its library as of March 31, 2012. This campaign (called Right to Read) increased pressure on all levels of government as CNIB requested bridge funding to support the continuation of library programs and services over a two-year transition period. Reaction to this funding request varied among the provinces and territories, and many stakeholders looked to the federal government for guidance. In the opinion of key informants, this was one of the factors that contributed to decisions by several provinces to take the position that the federal government should be the sole funder and coordinator of the network. With no consensus among stakeholders for a cost-shared approach, all meaningful dialogue with stakeholders stopped.

The Initiative would have benefitted from a more consistent management oversight in its early stages.

Evidence from evaluation interviews suggests that although LAC does have a broad access mandate and related activities in its operations, IELA remained a distinct initiative with the lead given to the Strategic Office. As such, IELA operated as a special project separate from operations and did not receive the level of oversight it needed. Furthermore, key informants suggested that IELA was launched with little consideration given to LAC's capacity or whether it had any clear authority to negotiate with the provinces and territories on issues of this nature, nor to the appropriate direction on the issues beyond the organization's purview (e.g., the administration of the *Copyright Act*, the Library Book Rate of Canada Post). Key informants also suggested that HRSDC, through its Office for Disability Issues (ODI)⁶, would have been better positioned to lead IELA on behalf of the Federal Government, given that it had the mandate, infrastructure, expertise and capacity to work with provincial and territorial officials and NGOs.

The evaluation found that the progress of the Initiative was scrutinized following changes in LAC's senior management in early 2009. Both lines of evidence showed that the Initiative was carefully reviewed at the time. Program documentation indicates that efforts were refocused on the development of a

⁶ [HRSDC mandate](#)

national strategy and costing, following a detailed review of the progress made on each of the five workstreams.

As reported by key informants, in 2010 it became apparent that a consensus could not be reached with stakeholders on a long-term strategy. Realising that the main objective of the Initiative could not be achieved, it was determined to end the Initiative and return unspent funds to the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF). A national strategy with options and costs for consideration by the Minister was not produced.

In 2011, the decision to end IELA was shared with representatives of several library stakeholders in May of that year. Subsequently, LAC made all IELA tools and documentation available to these stakeholders and committed to increase the accessibility of its holdings.

4. Lessons Learned

Relevance

In future, LAC should examine closely its involvement in new initiatives to ensure that they are better integrated within its core business. In the case of IELA, many key informants believed that the Initiative was not closely aligned with LAC's mandate.

Effectiveness

In cases where an initiative is exploratory and future funding is not yet secured, LAC should be clear about available funding from the start and actively engage potential partners in discussions around sustainability. In the case of IELA, an impression was created among stakeholders that significant activities would be carried out but no capacity or identified source of funding was in place to pay for the work. Stakeholders were disappointed when it became clear that their expectations would not be met. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly understood by all partners and stakeholders, from the onset, in order to keep expectations realistic.

Close management oversight is required for all initiatives, whether limited-term or permanent, to ensure that intended objectives remain achievable.

If it is determined that an initiative may overlap with other federal departmental jurisdictions, early consultations should take place to determine whether a horizontal approach would be beneficial. With federal partners in agreement about what can be feasibly accomplished, external partners from other jurisdictions could be more easily approached.

Finally, it is important to consider the rapid evolution of technology and how new innovations may have an impact on the issues being addressed in a project or initiative. As digital and alternative format content becomes more readily available in the mainstream marketplace, there is a potential for access to collections to be improved in a more cost-effective manner. LAC should reconsider ongoing projects on a continuous basis to ensure that cost-effective technological innovations are leveraged.

Annex A: Discussion Guide

Discussion Guide

As you are aware, the IELA was wound up in 2010 and excess funds were returned to the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF). An evaluation is required to close the file and to ensure that LAC complies with TBS requirements. The firm of T.K. Gussman Associates Inc. has been contracted to carry out the evaluation study. The evaluation of the IELA focuses on lessons learned and design issues.

Points for discussion:

- (1) Please give us an overview of your involvement with the IELA.
- (2) To what extent was the IELA aligned with the priorities of LAC and the Government of Canada?
- (3) To what extent was the IELA designed to help address the real needs for equitable library access for Canadians with print disabilities?
- (4) Have any lessons been learned from LAC's experience with the Initiative? Please elaborate on these and discuss how these lessons could inform future LAC strategies.
- (5) Were alternative design and implementation strategies considered and explored? Why were these not pursued? From your perspective, what could have been done differently and more efficiently? Would such approaches have been more or less practical than those that were employed?
- (6) In your view, what was achieved as a result of LAC's participation in this initiative?
- (7) To what extent was a nation-wide strategy developed and costed?
- (8) Can you suggest any key stakeholders you believe would be able to offer perspectives for this evaluation? **[For initial interviews only.]**

Thank you for participating in this evaluation.

Annex B: Selected References

[Campbell Consulting Ltd. Report to the Book and Periodical Council on Options for Making Published Materials More Accessible to the Visually Impaired: Final Report. February 18, 1998.](#)

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