



Reinventing Law Libraries in Canada: a unique business model in Alberta

Sonia Poulin

Alberta Law Libraries
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Rhonda O'Neill

Alberta Law Libraries
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Session:

214 — *Libraries for the law and for lawmakers* — Law Libraries with Library and Research Services for Parliaments

Abstract:

Alberta Law Libraries is a unique network of 50 law libraries operating within the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General in Alberta, Canada. This paper traces the libraries' history from their inception in 1885 to the present and examines steps the libraries have been taking since 2009 to implement cost savings, improve the client's research experience and offer solutions to unique challenges, all within strict budget limitations. Utilizing a collaborative, service oriented, responsive and flexible business model, the libraries have positioned themselves as a key player in improving access to legal information for all citizens.

Introduction

Alberta Law Libraries is a unique province-wide network of 50 law libraries¹ operating within the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General of Alberta, Canada (Alberta Justice). With an annual budget of \$7.3 million, the libraries provide access to legal information and research services to the legal community (judiciary, lawyers, law students and government employees), other libraries and the public. Alberta Law Libraries must ensure its mandate, resources and services align with the mission of three funding stakeholders – Alberta Justice and Solicitor General (a fair and safe Alberta); the Law Society of Alberta (To serve the public interest by promoting a high standard of legal services and professional conduct through the governance and regulation of an independent

¹ See map of Alberta Law Libraries on final page of paper.

legal profession.); and the Alberta Law Foundation (legal education and knowledge for the people of Alberta).

Law libraries have a long history in Alberta dating back to 1885, several years before Alberta became a province within Canada. Libraries were shared by all client groups and were considered central to the in Alberta. Currently, in Canada, government and law libraries are facing challenges to their existence as funders ponder the continued relevance of libraries.

This paper will outline the origin of Law Libraries in Alberta, following their history through to 2006 when a review of provincial law library services was completed. Coming out of this review, a number of recommendations were implemented and the libraries were reorganized. Steps taken by Alberta Law Libraries since 2009 to implement cost savings, eliminate unnecessary duplication of resources and improve the client's research experience, while adhering to strict budget limitations will be examined. Finally, a discussion of the challenges facing law libraries today and the unique position of Alberta Law Libraries from which to respond to these challenges will be addressed.

The Emergence of Professional Law Libraries in Western Canada: A Passionate Engagement

The history of the Law Libraries pre-dates the establishment of the Province of Alberta in 1905. In 1885, the North West Territories (turned over to the Government of Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870), then covering all the land that is now Alberta, Saskatchewan and much of Manitoba passed a *Legal Profession Ordinance*. This Ordinance provided for the incorporation of the Law Society of the North West Territories, empowering Benchers, "to spend such money as they felt necessary on the law libraries"² at such points in the Territories as deemed proper. The earliest libraries were established in the court houses of the judicial districts, in what is now the Province of Alberta, and included Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Fort MacLeod and Medicine Hat.

From the very beginning, the necessity of having law libraries to support the judicial process was recognized. Benchers from the Law Society of the North West Territories requested funds from the Government of the North West Territories, in the form of annual grant to help finance the reporting of Territorial cases and the operation of law libraries.³

In 1905, the *Alberta Act*⁴ carved the province of Alberta out of the North West Territories. At the same time, the province of Saskatchewan was created by the *Saskatchewan Act*⁵. Both provinces were to have their own law societies, automatically inheriting members of the Law Society of North West Territories, now resident in their province. Any law libraries existing in the Territories became the property of the Law Society of the Province in which it was located. As a result, the Law Society of Alberta came to have control of the libraries in Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Fort MacLeod and Medicine Hat. In 1907 the *Legal Profession Act*⁶ established the Law Society of Alberta and made provision for the Benchers of the newly-created Society to expend funds for the establishment of or addition to law libraries for the general use of members at such place or places in the province as they deemed proper. The libraries were governed in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Law Society of Alberta which stipulated that

² Marian Bryant, *The Law Society Library of Calgary : an historical perspective 1899-1984*. Calgary : Law Society Library, 1984-1988, p.5

³ Law Society of the North West Territories, Roll of Advocates January 11 1886 – 1907 Minute Book January 24 1899 – August 7, 1907, p. 5

⁴ *The Alberta Act*, S.C. 1905, c.3

⁵ *The Saskatchewan Act*, S.C. 1905, c. 42

⁶ *Legal Profession Act*, S.A. 1907, Chapter 20, ss 39, 40

the library be in a room approved by the library committee and furnished by the local Bar or the Attorney-General's office⁷

Between 1907 and 1949, the libraries expanded their reach throughout Alberta, growing to nine with the establishment of libraries at Grande Prairie, Vegreville, Wetaskiwin and Red Deer. Library administration was in the hands of the library committee, a standing committee "elected at the first convocation following the regular election of Benchers."⁸

In 1920, the Attorney General Department Library was created. This library provided legal information services to the Department's solicitors. It also handled requests from all Court Administrators, departmental branches, Crown Counsel (Civil Law) and for specified instances only, Crown Counsel (Criminal Justice) throughout the Province.

The Government of Alberta increased their involvement with the Alberta Law Society Libraries, which were located on government property in court houses. In 1924, the government further undertook responsibility for the librarians' salaries and became authorized to appoint librarians in these libraries.⁹

For decades, there was a long term problem of lost, missing and unreturned library books resulting in ever-increasing figures for replacement costs, gaps in the collection and wasted staff time tracking missing items. Increasingly, the Law Society felt that the courthouse libraries needed improvement and felt it was unreasonable that the Society should "bear the entire cost of maintaining and improving them"¹⁰. In 1949, a *Memorandum of Agreement* was signed between the Government of Alberta and the Law Society of Alberta whereby the Society assigned all law books in all nine locations over to Government. Under the Agreement, the government agreed to insure and house the collections, pay the salaries of all librarians, contribute to the cost of maintaining the collections, and provide access to members of the Law Society and the Courts. The Agreement also provided for the establishment of a Committee consisting of two solicitors from the Department of the Attorney General and two members of the Law Society with the sole mandate of selecting and allocating books for the libraries. At the time, the law libraries now located in Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Vegreville, Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, Fort MacLeod, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge were valued at \$262,979.72.¹¹

In March 1973, the Joint Library Committee addressed the issue of public access to the Alberta Law Society Libraries. The Committee decided that members of the public would be allowed to read materials located in the library, but would not be permitted to take them out of the libraries. Some reference assistance could be provided by the librarian, as long as it did not interfere with their daily routines.

While both the Law Society and Government continue to fund these libraries, the vast proportion of the cost of developing and maintaining the collections is borne through funding grants from the Alberta Law Foundation. The Foundation was created in 1973 by an amendment to the *Legal Profession Act*. The Foundation receives interest from the trust accounts held by lawyers and one of their objectives is the establishment, maintenance and operation of law libraries. The first annual grant was awarded to the libraries in the 1974-75 fiscal year in the amount of \$58,000. In September of 1975, there was a strong consensus that the Joint Library Committee should clearly distinguish between the Committee's normal allotment of Government and Law Society funds and the funds that were received from the Alberta Law Foundation. To this day, the funds are still managed and audited separately.

⁷ Bryant, p.8.

⁸ Ibid., p. 8

⁹ Ibid., p. 11

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11

¹¹ Ibid., p. 11

And then there were two... (library systems)

In 1975, the *Kirby Report*¹² was presented to the government of Alberta and was the impetus for the establishment of a separate system of libraries in Alberta. The Chairman, Justice W.J.C. Kirby was directed to look at and make recommendations about the administration of Provincial Courts in Alberta.

At the time, operations of the Provincial Court of Alberta struggled against a number of challenges including: a lack of identity and prestige of the Provincial Court; impossible workload of the judges and Crown prosecutors; identification of the Judges as instruments of the Attorney General's Department and of the court as a police court; congestion; delays; enormous case loads in Edmonton and Calgary; the inadequacy of the court facilities in Edmonton and elsewhere in the province. The jurisdiction of Provincial Court judges had expanded rapidly under federal legislation, but the infrastructure put in place by the provincial government to support the work of this court had not been examined and expanded to support this increased jurisdiction.

Provincial Court Judges were facing huge case loads; in 1973, 51 judges handled more than 240,000 matters¹³. The situation for Crown prosecutors was no better and it was becoming evident that they did not have the time to prepare properly for trials; often prosecutors would not even see the charges until they were tried at court. As so many Albertans received their introduction to justice through the Provincial Courts, it was seen as imperative that a better impression be made. The Kirby Board of Review was established under the *Public Inquiries Act* to examine and respond to these issues.

In looking at the overall administration of the Provincial Courts in Alberta, the review examined continuing education and access to legal information in the Provincial Courts. The *Kirby Report* recommended that prosecutors and defence counsel have adequate law libraries for their exclusive use in Edmonton and Calgary and elsewhere in the province. It also recommended that every prosecutor be provided with an adequate basic library for his or her own use.¹⁴ In looking at the need for Provincial Judges to receive continuing training, the report noted that in order to deal with a multitude of complex legal problems it had "become imperative that all Provincial Court judges have a basic personal legal library and ready access to a comprehensive law library"¹⁵. It was particularly emphasized that the problem of inadequate libraries was acute in rural locations. The report recommended that special attention be given to the library requirements of judges in rural and remote areas of the province. Coming out of the *Kirby Report*, the Provincial Court Libraries system was established. This system included 12 Judicial Libraries, 15 Crown libraries and 16 Legal Reference Libraries (with adjoining Judge's Reading Rooms¹⁶).

In 1979/80, 64 libraries and reading rooms were in operation across the province under the two library systems:

1. Provincial Court Libraries: 49 locations provided legal information services to judges and crown counsel. Where no other law libraries exist, the Provincial Court Libraries were

¹² Alberta. Board of Review. Provincial Courts., *Administration of justice in the Provincial Courts of Alberta*. Edmonton : The Board, 1975.

¹³ Kirby Report, p. 5

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ These reading rooms duplicated subscription materials found on the shelves of the Legal Reference Libraries to which they were attached. In 1990/91 to assist with cost control, the Judiciary agreed to close these reading rooms under the understanding that the Legal Reference Libraries would continue to operate as part of the Provincial Court Libraries system.

committed to provide access to the collections to members of the Bar, government officials, police, and members of the public.

2. Courthouse or Alberta Law Society Libraries (sometimes also referred to as Court of Appeal or Court of Queen's Bench Libraries) included 9 Law Society Libraries, 3 Court of Appeal/Court of Queen's Bench judicial libraries and the Attorney-General's Library. These libraries were operated under an agreement between the Department of Attorney General and the Law Society of Alberta. The Attorney-General's Library provided legal information services to the department's solicitors, court administrators, and departmental branches. The Joint Library Committee administered those libraries.

Growth of the system was reflected in the growth of the legal profession in Alberta. Two law schools within the province and the attractions of a thriving economy saw an ever increasing legal population and constantly growing demands for legal resources and services. The Alberta Law Foundation grant permitted major changes in collection development in Edmonton, Calgary, and the branches. Improved collections meant greater use by the profession and an increase in the number of professional librarians working in these law libraries.

In the mid 1990's in response to an economic downturn, and a loss of funding from the Alberta Law Foundation to the Alberta Law Society Libraries and Legal Reference Libraries, there was once more a strong desire to find a solution to the problem of funding libraries in Alberta. A study of the libraries serving members of the bar and public in Alberta was commissioned by Alberta Justice, the Alberta Law Foundation and the Law Society of Alberta. The final report of the commission, known as the *MacPherson Report*¹⁷, made recommendations resources be introduced into Law Society and Legal Reference libraries; that a not-for-profit corporation be established and managed by a board to operate the organization in a business-like way; that the operation of the Legal Reference Libraries be transferred to the Law Society library; that technical services and acquisitions for all libraries be centralized out of the Alberta Law Society Libraries; and that the new corporation work with the Legal Resource Centre and Public Libraries to meet the legal information needs of the public. This report further recommended the new organization work in partnership with the Legal Education Society of Alberta, the Universities, the Canadian Bar Association, Alberta Branch and other partners. These recommendations were met with resistance from members of the judiciary who were concerned that the transfer of Legal Reference Libraries to the Alberta Law Society Libraries would result in these collections being scaled back or closed. There was a feeling that funding for the Legal Reference Libraries, which would be transferred with the libraries, would then be redirected to the financially struggling Alberta Law Society Libraries.

In 1996, University Information Enterprises, University of Alberta, submitted a proposal to the Joint Library Committee of the Law Society of Alberta and Alberta Justice. The plan proposed reorganizing and coordinating management of Provincial Law Library resources, through the University of Alberta. The plan relied to a great extent on a client self-service model with document delivery used to deliver resources not available online (in 1996). This proposal appeared to be particularly beneficial to the University libraries, which were facing drastic budget reductions themselves. The purported advantages of this proposal were rejected by Alberta Justice as it was felt by some that the University would not be able to meet the needs of clients for quality or timeliness of service delivery and that a move in this direction would result in delays in service and greater expense, not cost savings. A major criticism of the proposal was that the technology it counted on to provide the proposed services did not yet exist or else had significant problems which still needed to be resolved.

At around this time, the Court of Appeal and Court of Queen's Bench Judiciary in Alberta, who received library services through the Alberta Law Society Libraries, struck a library review

¹⁷ Lillian Bjarnason MacPherson. *Final report of the study of law libraries serving the bar and public in Alberta*. Edmonton: Commissioned and funded by Alberta Justice, Alberta Law Foundation, Law Society of Alberta, 1995.

committee. They had become dissatisfied with the services being provided to them through the Alberta Law Society Libraries, saw the electronic resources, reference and training services being made available to the Provincial Court judiciary and desired a similar system for their courts. The Provincial Court judiciary supported this desire, acknowledging that economies of scale could be realized by having all levels of the judiciary share a commonly managed judges' library system. This transfer occurred in 2000 when Provincial Court Libraries took over the management of the Court of Appeal and Court of Queen's Bench judicial libraries in Edmonton and Calgary and hired dedicated Law Librarians to provide training and reference services.

During this same period, the Alberta Law Foundation advised the Joint Library Committee that it was unhappy with the apparent lack of direction for the Alberta Law Society Libraries and indicated that funding from the Foundation would not be forthcoming until the libraries retained a qualified law librarian to provide leadership and direction for the libraries. Thus, a separate management structure was established for the libraries and a Chief Librarian appointed in 2000 for the Alberta Law Society Libraries.

In 1999-2000, Alberta Justice and the Attorney General received an invitation to participate in a shared services initiative to provide more effective library service within the Government of Alberta (the "Alberta Government Libraries"). The response of the department to this invitation was to indicate that initiatives regarding the Alberta Justice Libraries were underway involving the legal profession and the judiciary. While Alberta Justice would be pleased to participate in a review of library services, they cautioned that they would not be able to agree to any changes that may impact services provided to the legal professional or the judiciary without prior consultations with these groups.

This decision not to participate in the shared services initiative turned out to be a watershed moment for Alberta Law Libraries' continued growth and viability in period of difficult change for government and special libraries in general. Library services were provided by Alberta Justice in partnership with the Law Society of Alberta and involve the legal profession as well as the judiciary. Alberta Law Society Libraries in various court houses were maintained pursuant to an agreement with the Law Society of Alberta, and funding for the books at these libraries were provided, in a large part, by the Law Society of Alberta and Alberta Law Foundation. Providing the judiciary with access to materials in a secure environment was also raised as a significant issue. As a result, the law libraries did not formally join the shared services initiative of the Government of Alberta. This turned out to be significant decision as in 2010/11, Service Alberta responded to fiscal pressures by closing locations of the government library and eliminating positions (through attrition). If Alberta Justice had participated in this government-wide library reorganization, several libraries could have been lost, libraries considered central to the administration of justice by our clients.

Although reporting to senior management of Alberta Justice (Court Services) the Alberta Law Society Libraries, Provincial Court Libraries (named Alberta Courts Libraries after 2006), and the Departmental Library were at the time still considered three separate entities. This was not, however, the end of the shuffling of specific libraries between the systems. For instance, the Departmental Library was transferred to Alberta Court Libraries in 2007, a maneuver which eliminated one of the three management structures previously in place. The two separate management structures, Alberta Court Libraries and Alberta Law Society libraries then co-existed until 2008.

The Legal Reference Library in the emerging community of Fort McMurray was also subject to questions as to which system it should sit with. Members of the Joint Library Committee had agreed back in 1982 that each judicial district should have its own Law Society Library. At the time, negotiations had taken place between the Law Society and Alberta Justice to create a Law Society Library in the newly created judicial district of Fort McMurray, even though there was already a Legal Reference Library located in that district. The Committee considered asking Alberta Justice to expand the use of the existing library to include a civil law collection. Staffing

turned out to be an issue at the time, coupled with the difficulty of separating the judicial collection from the main collection. It was not until December 1, 2006, that the Legal Reference Libraries located in the judicial districts of Fort McMurray and St. Paul were transferred to Alberta Law Society Libraries. Additional hours were provided to the Library Coordinators in these locations and print collections were enhanced by a grant from the Alberta Law Foundation.

This shuffling around, while creating opportunities to provide improved services and collections to specific client groups, did little to improve the cost effectiveness. For one thing, the libraries as a whole were still managed by two separate management structures with parallel and duplicated roles and expertise. Alberta Justice once again became concerned with reducing library expenditures in a way that would meet with the requirement of providing access to legal information to support the administration of justice.

The Alberta Law Libraries Review

In November 2006, the desire to make changes to Alberta's system of libraries was once more pushed to the forefront. A new Assistant Deputy Minister for Court Services had questioned the need for duplication of library materials between Law Society and/or Legal Reference Libraries and Judicial Libraries located within court houses across the province. Shortly after this observation, the Chief Librarian for Alberta Law Society Libraries announced her impending retirement. The government was once again looking for ways to improve legal information service delivery to client stakeholders while managing services and resources more cost effectively through the elimination of duplication. As a result, a review of law libraries in Alberta was undertaken and supported by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Alberta Justice and the Law Society of Alberta. The purpose of the review was to determine whether efficiencies could be made to the library systems and to determine what those efficiencies might be, while continuing to provide the highest level of library services to all users of law library resources. Stakeholders wanted the libraries to create an efficient, cost-effective, sustainable and adaptable business environment, enabling the libraries to focus resources on the core mission of providing legal information services to the legal community and all Albertans.

A Steering Committee consisting of library user groups and other stakeholders was established to provide direction and to approve recommendations resulting from this review. Over the course of the review, consultations were conducted with employees of the library systems, librarians from outside of Alberta Justice, including Academic and Law Firm libraries, and Directors from neighbouring library systems. Additionally members of the judiciary and practicing bar were invited to participate in interviews and focus groups.

Upon completion of the review process, a business case was prepared containing several recommendations related to the governance, organizational structure, administration, accountability and collections of the law libraries. These recommendations were approved by the Steering Committee in May 2007. The business case suggested that efficiencies could be found through a single-delivery system under common library management. As a result, a new director position was created to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and Alberta Law Libraries was formally established in January 2009.

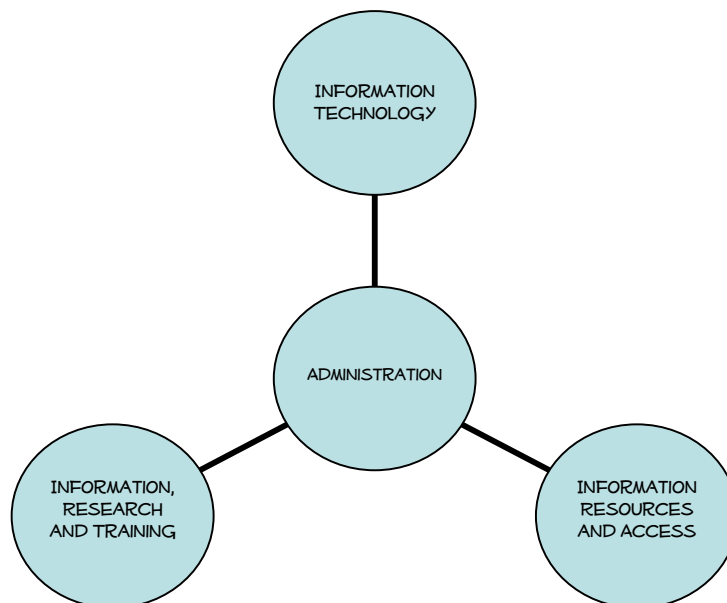
Implementing recommendations from the review

The new director arrived in Alberta in April 2008 to take on the reorganization of Alberta's Law Libraries. At the time, there were two law library systems (excluding universities and private collections) operating in Alberta. The Alberta Court Libraries (ACL) formed one system, including Court of Appeal / Queen's Bench Libraries, Judges Reference Libraries, Crown Libraries and Legal Reference Libraries, all funded by Alberta Justice (Court Services). Alberta Court Libraries also managed the Departmental Library, whose collections were funded by Alberta Justice (Legal

Services Division). The second system was the Alberta Law Society Libraries (ALSL) funded by the Law Society of Alberta, Alberta Law Foundation and Alberta Justice (Court Services).

The review had identified the essential elements for managing and operating a new unified model such as collaboration, accountability, communication and fiscal responsibility. These elements were considered essential to an effective governance and organization structure for delivery of law library services in Alberta in order to support consistent, effective, and accountable decision making.

While the review recommended a unified model with one branch managing all law libraries, it continued to make a clear distinction between two designated areas: the judiciary as one stream and practicing bar, crown prosecutors, government lawyers, and other staff and the public for the other stream. Aside from having a common administration team, the new director did not see how this model was any different than the ones in place prior to 2008. The relationship between library systems over several decades with respect to collections was not as collaborative as it once was. If the new organization was really going to make a difference and be fiscally responsible by removing duplication of resources and services, all the libraries had to fall under the same umbrella. Thus, the recommended designated areas were blended into one.



The recommendations of the Report were as follows:

1. Implement an alternate governance and organization structure as described above; a unified model affording a high degree of collaboration, communication, consistency and overall efficiency.
2. Establish judicial and crown user groups with the objective of determining appropriate print and electronic resources, and determining the best use of funds.
3. Develop a single set of planning and policy documents applicable to delivery of all law library resources and services through any type or level of library.
4. Develop one Essential Law Library defining minimum collection standards for Alberta Court Libraries and the Departmental Library. This would be an extension to the Essential Law Library currently in place for the Alberta Law Society Libraries.

5. Blend the technical services into one shared service area supporting operations of all law libraries.
6. Develop a reporting structure where each employee reports to only one supervisor.
7. Minimize continuous updates to print loose-leaf subscriptions. Replace this with the purchase of annual or less frequent updates where practicable.
8. Reduce the collections maintained in judicial libraries while increasing the reliance on collections in the local Alberta Law Society Libraries in Edmonton or Calgary.
9. Model the Legal Reference Libraries similar to Alberta Law Society Libraries in smaller locations, designated as 'local' libraries, promoting increased reliance on larger collections and services provided remotely from Edmonton and Calgary resource libraries.

Further to the recommendations, the director added an action plan addressing overall management and leadership strategies, and improvements to each of the units created in order to support the unified model of service delivery.

Collaboration, communication and participative management are important in an organization. One crucial step in reorganizing the libraries was meeting with the various team leads of the different libraries to discuss the recommendations, present the implementation plan and new organizational structure, but most importantly, receive their feedback on the new model. Change is difficult and one cannot expect to have no resistance to an outsider coming in and telling long-term employees just how it's going to be done from now on! These individuals had years of experience within their respective library systems, systems which to a certain extent had been in competition with one another throughout the last decade. These conversations gave the director an idea on how employees were likely to react to the change when it was presented and implemented. It was an important step to help make the transition a smooth process. A key message throughout this process was that the libraries were being given a golden opportunity to re-invent themselves as a new organization. It was also important to find champions within the organization who viewed the changes as opportunities and could help others who viewed the reorganization as a bad thing. Following conversations with team members, the director met with all of the stakeholders to present the new organizational chart and strategies that were to be implemented. The plan was widely accepted without any changes. The new name of the organization was formally adopted by all stakeholders as Alberta Law Libraries.

The reorganization of the libraries into one unified library model meant abolishing and creating new positions, mainly at the management team level. The director worked on new position descriptions and worked closely with human resources in assessing new position classifications, working within the libraries' financial human resources allocation. There were no layoffs and no loss of salary for any team member. The new positions were advertised internally and team members applied for the positions they were interested in, creating some stress and a bit of competition amongst team members. The new organizational structure was implemented in January 2009. Overall, it was a successful process, and all team members were extremely collaborative, understanding, dedicated to make it work, but most importantly, respectful of others. Two-way communication and transparency were key in this process.

The new Alberta Law Libraries began implementing the action plan that was designed over an 18-month period. The first year of being Alberta Law Libraries was very difficult on the morale of the employees. We had to find ways for people to let go of the past, as you cannot move forward and build an organization when your team members are staring in the rearview mirror! We were very fortunate to be provided with financial resources to have a 2-day retreat for the organization. We were also fortunate that our stakeholders understood the importance of getting our people together at a crucial time in the history of law libraries in Alberta. We asked our part-time circulation assistants to cover the reference desks in Edmonton and Calgary, informing clients and stakeholders in advance of the reduction in level of service during that period. The retreat

was well-received by the team, in many cases team members located throughout the province had worked together for several years via telephone and e-mail and had never had the opportunity to meet. Meeting and developing relationships informally, while creating opportunities for learning, was an excellent team-building exercise and a very positive outcome for the organization.

Strategic planning was next on the agenda. What do we do? Who are our clients and funding partners? Do we have any competitors? How are we different? What's our mission? What is our vision? Does the organization have a value-system? In order to continue receiving funding, it was important to ensure that our mandate, resources and services aligned with the mission, goals and objectives of our three funding stakeholders – Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, the Law Society of Alberta, and the Alberta Law Foundation – as well as with our client stakeholders.

A Strategic Planning Committee was formed, with an invitation being issued to members of Alberta Law Libraries' team to meet together and plot a path towards the future. More specifically, the goal was to put in place a strategic change process that would result in ALL being a world leader in legal information services. An extensive gap analysis was completed, to review where we were, where we wanted to be, and how we planned to get there. The Alberta Law Libraries Strategic Plan for 2010-2013 was results based and client-focused, yet acknowledged this involved constant planning, continued reassessment of decision making and the persistent re-evaluation and report of results. (See diagram below.)



The team spent a considerable amount of time discussing and deciding on Alberta Law Libraries' mandate, mission, vision and values:

Our Mandate

- We are a human organization, dedicated to promoting and serving the administration of justice through client-centered activities and empowering stakeholders with legal information.
- We are committed to transforming Alberta Law Libraries into a dynamic and comprehensive legal information organization accessible to all Albertans.
- We provide choice, customizing legal information services to the specific needs of our stakeholders.
- We are an integral and active part of our communities, reaching out to our stakeholders beyond the walls of the libraries.

Our Mission

Your legal information navigator.

Our Vision:

We connect you to the world of legal information in an open and innovative environment. When you need it. How you need it.

This was a vital team exercise that helped us move forward as a team. Our stakeholders were provided opportunities to comment and provide their input. While we may be the ones working at Alberta Law Libraries, the libraries would not exist without our stakeholders.

Our strategy was then driven through our core ideology (stated mission, vision and values). Our tasks emerged directly from our strategic intent.

Our delivery system incorporated our four Strategic “P”s in service to our clients:

- personal service;
- engaging participation from our clients;
- building peer-to-peer resources;
- and then adjusting our strategic process by monitoring psychographic data (the use of demographics to obtain market data from people’s attitudes, lifestyles, etc.).

Whether our clients are part of the administration of justice, otherwise internal to the Justice System, or external (the general public), our delivery will always be consistently maintained and monitored through our core ideology.

Our Values

Integrity, Innovation, Commitment, Collaboration, Respect

At our strategic planning sessions, it was determined by the strategy group that the following encapsulate the definition of our values.

Integrity

We are open and honest in dealing with colleagues and clients. We walk our talk.

Innovation

We seek opportunities to embrace change in order to fulfill our mandate and to achieve more with less.

Commitment

We fully participate in the continued growth of our organization and its broadening engagement with the community at large.

Collaboration

We partner with our stakeholders to achieve our goals.

Respect

We foster an environment in which each person is valued and treated fairly.

Alberta Law Libraries believes that our entire team and stakeholders should be given the opportunity to contribute to setting goals, decision-making and problem solving. While our team members may bring forward complaints, they are strongly encouraged to also bring a solution. We strive to ensure at all times that everyone on the team understands the big picture. Naturally,

individuals tend to think *tree-by-tree* but we think everyone should process information through *forest thinking* in order to increase understanding of where the organization is heading and how everyone makes a difference. The aim has been and will always be to create a sense of belonging, teamwork and empowerment. We want our people to be creative and innovative in order to test assumptions and continually strive for improvement. A familiar quotation notes “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”. Alberta Law Libraries provides opportunities for continuous learning whether through a formal learning environment, through conference attendance or through self-directed learning teams.

The benefits of this organizational change have been tremendous:

- process improvements
- better service
- greater success
- individual and collective learning opportunities
- employee engagement
- sense of pride and ownership
- job satisfaction
- increase of productivity and quality

Most importantly, our organization is driven by our clients’ needs not ours! We continually make decisions as a team with our various client groups and stakeholders: judiciary, crown, departmental, bar and public.

From managing libraries to navigating the legal information landscape

Following from the reorganization of the libraries into one organization, Alberta Law Libraries needed to create one team identity within a network of libraries, very much used to working independently, together. Both library systems had logos representing their respective library systems and numerous marketing materials were created independently within specific libraries and did not always benefit from using a shared repository of approved materials. Both systems had logos developed by a graphic designer based on the image these libraries wished to portray.

As a new system, Alberta Law Libraries wanted to do things differently and adopt a logo that spoke to the essence of what we were doing in the eyes of our clients. We also wanted a new visual identity that could be adopted by both former teams to help with the integration of our systems and aid team-building. Over several months, we sought out a marketing and design firm to do the client research and build a brand identity around this feedback. We wanted to find out what our clients thought about the libraries and our services in order to build a new visual identity based around this information.

A survey, unlike any survey we had ever utilized, was developed for us and we brought it to our client groups at the end of 2009. We had specific targets to meet in terms of responses. All team members participated in encouraging our different client groups (judiciary, crown, practicing bar, Alberta Justice employees and public) to complete the survey. This survey asked a number of questions including, *if Alberta Law Libraries were a person, who would it be?* We were pleased when the results came back and told us that those who used the libraries held us in very high regard but that a lack of widespread visibility was our problem.

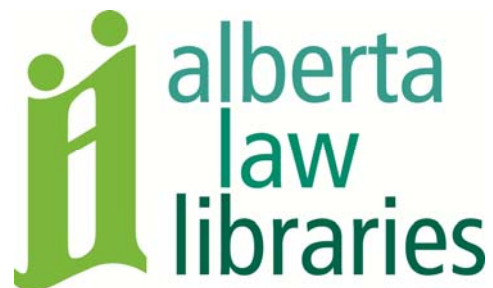
There was a strong consistency of responses across the province, indicating that a uniform brand would work throughout the province with both the legal profession and public.

The survey told us a number of things, including:

- our clients expect to have easy access to knowledgeable people and current information in our libraries.
- our libraries are seen as helpful, because our people connect them with the information they need.
- other terms used to describe the libraries included: wise, visionary, mentoring, organized, systematic and nurturing.

When asked who the libraries would be if they were a person, respondents indicated figures such as Albert Einstein, Mother Theresa, Barack Obama, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, all intelligent leaders, all leaders during tough times; some of these figures are even heroic in the eyes of respondents. The marketing firm advised that our "brand personality" must be seen as being ready to help, accessible and approachable, personable and friendly, current and up to date, as well as knowledgeable and informative. As a result, our brand became, "...a friendly person to whom one can refer to gain knowledge and information about legal matters in Alberta".

Of the concepts presented to us, one stood out because it matched with the direction we were heading. Rather than a more traditional logo featuring the shape of a book emphasizing the print collections side of libraries, the logo we selected takes the shape of people, emphasizing the human side of legal information services. It also speaks well to the collaborative nature that is the goal of Alberta Law Libraries. The white space between the two people forms the letter "i" for information, in a nod to more traditional library logos.



As libraries continue to evolve we must continue to communicate with our clients and stakeholders that libraries today are less about physical collections and more about the expert information providers connecting people with the legal information they need.

The role we as librarians fulfill has not changed; we are still organizing and making accessible the information our clients need. As the amount of information is issued in increasingly diverse formats, the need to build relationships between information seeker and information navigator becomes paramount.

Ongoing challenges in legal information services: legal publishing and the Canadian Perspective

The legal publishing industry in Canada, particularly as it concerns electronic access to legal information, has seen a number of changes over the past two decades. Quicklaw (originally Quic/Law) the first legal database in Canada got its start as a joint project between Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario) and IBM. Following the withdrawal of IBM from the project due to government policies on the control of Canadian information, Professors Hugh Lawford and Richard vonBriesen (Queen's University) launched Quicklaw as a private company.

As Quicklaw was the first company to offer this form of access, they were able to make content from other legal publishers in Canada available online. At one time Maritime Law Book, Canada Law Book, CCH, Carswell/Thomson, Irwin Law Books, Western Legal Publications and Éditions Yvon Blais all published materials through Quicklaw. Additionally, Quicklaw provided a gateway to Westlaw and to InfoGlobe online for news.

As technology became increasingly available and easier to implement, a number of publishers withdrew their materials from Quicklaw in favour of creating their own systems. This was a period of great fracturing in online legal information. If a researcher wished to access a comprehensive collection of legal resources, they were placed in a position where they needed to purchase access to a number of different online resources. When this happened, a number of libraries that had made the shift to certain electronic titles, discontinuing the print equivalent, found they did not have the funding to purchase access to multiple databases. These libraries were left with gaps in their collections and in some instances had to purchase back volumes in order to eliminate these gaps. While we acknowledged that moving to electronic resources meant we were renting instead of owning our legal information, an increased reluctance and lack of trust that electronic resources would be stable in the long term started here.

In many locations this rapid proliferation of online resources, meant costs additional to the cost of maintaining print subscriptions. Although there was a great desire for the convenience offered to the researcher by electronic resources, there was also a lack of trust in the format, particularly in Court libraries, where “official” print publications are often still preferred by many for use in Court. This meant a continued reliance on print resources, even as electronic resources were increasingly more available and accessible.

Another factor adding to the urgency of moving several client groups to legal information in the electronic format has been the rapid proliferation of looseleaf titles. Once very desirable to legal researchers, as they were often more up to date than a traditional text, in our current environment of online legal research, many librarians are pondering the continued relevance of this format given the costs of purchasing and maintaining these subscriptions.

In Alberta, as well as elsewhere across Canada, we began replacing looseleaf sets annually rather than pay the ongoing maintenance throughout the year as a cost saving measure several years ago. To illustrate the potential savings offered by this practice, in Canada one premiere looseleaf on criminal procedure costs approximately \$600 to buy new, but \$1800 to buy with updates throughout the year. Alberta Law Libraries currently owns 59 copies of this particular title. The publisher of this set announced in October, 2011 that the practice of requesting annual updates will no longer be permitted. This means we would need to pay in excess of \$106,200 to maintain our print copies in the future.

We are simply unable to sustain pricing such as this in an environment of limited fiscal resources. Rather, we will cancel this publication in many of our libraries in favour of providing access to the electronic product for a number of our clients. Unfortunately, the cost of licensing many electronic resources puts them out of reach of our practicing bar and public clients. These clients will need to continue to rely on the print publication where available as well as consult other resources for information on criminal procedure.

In Canada, a number of publishers use a “per potential user” pricing model. This model simplifies the process of calculating a value and seems to function well enough in a law firm environment. This model calculates subscription fees based on the number of people who could potentially access the product. What this model willfully fails to recognize is that not all people will access or even wish to access a certain product. In a non-profit environment, tasked with providing information services to approximately 300 judicial clients, 700 Alberta Justice lawyers and paralegals, 8000 members of the bar and more than 3.6 million citizens, a pricing scheme that is based on the number of individuals who might possibly seek to access information from the

database, is not supportable. At Alberta Law Libraries, we have had vendors price their products out of consideration, though there have been some recent improvements in this regard. There is high competition amongst legal publishers, with one another and with free resources available on the internet (in Canada, the Canadian Legal Information Institute - CanLII offers an impressive collection of legislation and case law from across the country); their market is similarly suffering and it would be beneficial to both libraries and publishers to work together to ensure that we all adapt to meet future challenges.

Money, Money, Money: Funding our collections

When Alberta Law Libraries was formed, it was created out of two systems that had experienced numerous financial challenges over the years. On the Alberta Court Libraries side, the collections budget had remained unchanged since 2001 in the face of an inflation rate that averaged 8.6% per year. In order to keep costs down, collections were reviewed and 1,410 subscriptions cancelled between 2001 and 2011. On the Alberta Law Society Libraries side, continuous evaluation of subscription services and cancellations were also being made in order to ensure the libraries remained sustainable.

These two systems had different funding structures which did not change following the implementation of the Alberta Law Libraries Review. Alberta Justice continues to provide complete funding for the 39 judicial, crown, departmental and legal reference libraries (including all human resources, facilities, operational costs and collections). The eleven former Alberta Law Society Libraries receive funding from Alberta Justice (human resources, facilities, some operational costs and a small grant for collections), Law Society of Alberta (collections and operational costs) and Alberta Law Foundation (collections).

One of the recommendations of the review was to reduce duplicate print collections maintained in judicial and crown libraries in favour of electronic access and reliance on collections located in the larger resource libraries located in Edmonton and Calgary. While judicial libraries will continue to have a need for core, high demand materials, with the electronic resources now available to this client group, they now have access to a personal electronic library at their desktops, the extent of which was unimaginable a few short years ago. Our job now is to ensure they are aware of these resources and equipped to access them from anywhere in the province.

Clients and Consultation: Reinventing Alberta Law Libraries as a collaborative organization

Given the changes to the libraries over the years, we recognized the importance of ensuring we were moving in a direction that would serve the future needs of our clients in an effective and efficient manner. We knew we needed to start many conversations and keep these going as we implemented changes to the library system.

Following the rebranding exercise, and rising out of our strategic plan, we wanted to ensure that our internet and intranet sites were redesigned to incorporate our new look and we also wanted to ensure that the services and resources of most interest to our clients were kept in focus as we implemented our strategic plan. In January 2010, Alberta Law Libraries undertook another survey, this one involving members of the Law Society of Alberta and seeking information on their impressions on our collections, services and website. The survey further asked members of the bar what services they used and/or would like to see, what subject areas were of most interest to them, what they thought of existing library hours and their opinion on the Libraries' website.

A comment that appeared more than once in the results was that clients were not aware of the existing website; if they had been aware of it at one time, they had forgotten about it. Our clients

told us that they desired the ability to access more information from the website and they also wanted access to databases (Quicklaw and/or Westlaw) within the libraries located in Calgary and Edmonton. In our rural locations, both Alberta Law Society Libraries and Legal Reference Libraries had Westlaw Canada's LawSource available on computers in the library. At the time of negotiating this contract, the high cost of adding access in Calgary and Edmonton ruled it out. It was generally felt that having this access in rural locations helped balance uneven access to legal information in rural Alberta, given the superior state of physical collections housed in Calgary and Edmonton. Clients also told us that they would like to access databases remotely rather than visiting the physical library. We are currently examining our contracts and working collaboratively with our publishers to start pushing remote access out to our clients in the legal community. At the same time, we must continually bear in mind the needs of our public clients, it is a delicate balance.

Following this survey, a project team was put together to redesign the Libraries' website to better meet the needs of our clients, as we understood these from the survey results. In December 2011 our new website was launched. This redesigned website features a current awareness ticker, a blog, a legal research toolbox, the beginnings of a video tutorial collection and links to relevant resources and research guides. Prior to launch we again approached clients to assist us in conducting usability testing. We are pleased with the feedback we have received since launching the new website. People like the clarity and ease of navigation it offers. We are looking forward to increasing the amount of training materials and other resources available via the website as we move forward.

As noted above, one of the recommendations of the review, was to reduce print duplication in our libraries in favour of electronic access and an increased reliance on centralized collections, especially the resource libraries located in Edmonton and Calgary. As part of the process of reducing unnecessary print duplication, the libraries have embarked on a project to revamp the Judicial Intranet. Seeking again to employ a collaborative approach, we requested the Judicial Library Committee appoint representatives to work with the libraries on collections issues and the intranet redesign. The project team was formed and turned our collaborative efforts toward developing a survey for the judiciary in Alberta, to determine their needs and wishes in terms of services and collections. With their feedback in hand, the project team examined other judicial/justice intranets and set to work determining the need content and its arrangement on the redesigned intranet.

The intranet project underway will provide judiciary with a clean and easily navigated launch pad through which they can keep up to date on current legal happenings, select the best resources to search in order to meet their information needs and call on the expert legal researchers located in our libraries for information and support when needed. The collaboration of legal counsel with judicial librarians will mean that the new intranet is built to meet the needs of the client from the outset. Too often, a product is developed to serve a client population, without that population being represented at the table. Alberta Law Libraries values the conversations we have with our clients that keep our focus on meeting real versus perceived needs.

Safeguarding equal access to information

In Canada, there are very few public law libraries. We have public libraries, housing small collections of highly referenced legal information. We have academic libraries housing extensive legal collections but focused on providing services to members of the University community (faculty and students). Law Society Libraries similarly focus on providing services to members of their local Law Society, though a number will allow members of the public to utilize collections in the library. In Alberta, we are charged with providing access to legal information to members of the public. While public members are not yet able to sign out books from our libraries, we are examining procedures in terms of interlibrary loans in order to improve public access to legal materials.

As well, members of the public feature prominently in our collections strategy as we choose resources that will provide assistance to them in understanding their legal rights and obligations such as self-help and law for the layperson publications. We also take great care to ensure that members of the public are provided access under our licensing agreements to the electronic resources available in the libraries.

Maintaining equal access to information will continue to present challenges as we attempt to push information services further into rural Alberta and look to improve access to information via the internet for both the legal community and public. It will become increasingly important to work with publishers of legal information (both free and subscription services) in order to leverage technology more effectively to meet the challenges of providing legal information services into the future.

There is more for us to do for Albertans in order to enhance the delivery of relevant legal information and facilitate access to justice in Alberta. Although there are many organizations producing plain language Public Legal Education materials, in many cases Albertans are unaware that these materials exist and do not know where to find them. A number of organizations lack the human resources to develop and distribute needed materials. The result is gaps in the information made available to Albertans. A lack of communication between organizations means that they are not able to coordinate their efforts to reduce duplication and more effectively leverage their funding.

Alberta Law Libraries is collaborating with the Legal Resource Centre in Edmonton to establish the Alberta Legal Information Society. This society will explore the development of a legal information website for Albertans. The outcome of this initiative will result in a unified, dynamic, flexible and easily expandable website that improves the ability of Albertans to access legal information, learn about the law and find accurate referrals to other organizations. Additionally, this website will be a great benefit to participating organizations. The improved awareness amongst service providers participating and contributing content will mean better referrals amongst organizations, collaboration on needed projects and the avoidance of costly duplication.

Conclusion

Alberta Law Libraries has moved towards becoming a client-centred service organization, one that recognizes that its vitality, continued success and growth depends entirely on its ability to mobilize its clients to be integral parts of the organization, not just end users distanced from the system or library “patrons” not personally invested in the system. Since 1885, our stakeholders have demonstrated the fundamental need to create, develop, and maintain law libraries in Alberta. Over the years, our stakeholders have protected the libraries from being subsumed into other systems and/or outsourced, options which would have been detrimental to the administration of justice.

Although it is important that we collaborate with other institutions, we are currently experiencing a situation in which we cannot make decisions about the materials we retain based on the belief that certain resources will be available in the long term through other institutions. Recent events in Canada demonstrate that libraries are at a critical turning point. To provide a recent example, as part of the 2012 budget, the Government of Canada will cut \$5.2 billion over three years from departments and agencies, including Libraries and Archives Canada. These cuts will result in the elimination of a number of federal government libraries and end to funding support for archives across the country.

Funding is being cut because these libraries are considered expensive overhead, in many cases the decision makers are not cognizant of the value libraries are providing to their various client groups. A common misperception is that all the information one needs to support decision

making and planning can be found for free on the internet, or in a limited offering of electronic products. Law libraries are central to the administration of justice, supporting the legal profession in their delivery of high quality legal services through the provision of legal information resources and services. In providing equal access to legal information, we also support access to justice, a fundamental right, for all Albertans. But we need to do more. Alberta Law Libraries is paying more attention to the return on investment metrics, both qualitative and quantitative. To demonstrate our value, we need to find metrics that will resonate with our stakeholders and funders. We need to think and behave like a business if we want to be around in the future. Long gone are the days when libraries were guaranteed funding.

In the context of dramatic cuts to such important institutions as Libraries and Archives Canada, Alberta Law Libraries' achievement of continued stable funding and support from multiple stakeholders is, we think, significant. In fact, this dependence on multiple stakeholders is perhaps a model for other special libraries to follow. By only having one funding stakeholder, a library is under much greater risk if and when that stakeholder's priorities change. Our continued success is also due to the close collaboration with our clients and stakeholders to ensure that our services and resources are meeting their needs now, and evolving to meet their future needs. Without our clients, we have no reason to exist and for this reason they must be fully participating in the planning process at every step.

The Alberta Law Libraries Review created one system out of three. We are moving forward as a unified system, with our passionate brand-builders who have a long-term vested interest and passion for the continued success of law libraries in Alberta. Together, we will ensure that we remain relevant to judicial administration, the legal community and all Albertans for many more years to come.

See you at the IFLA conference 2112!

