IPC Advocacy: Census, Net Neutrality, and More

By Leanna Jantzi.

Information Policy Committee members have been busy over the past few months, raising awareness about information policy and advocating for affordable and equitable access to information.

Census long form

In the summer, the federal government announced the replacement of Statistics Canada's mandatory long form census with a voluntary survey. Canadians across the country debated this move and critics argued the removal of the long form will create a dearth of information and be detrimental to research, public policy, and social programs.

The IPC is closely following the long form census issue and hosted a well-attended salon in August on the topic. Speakers included Bill Siksay, NDP Member of Parliament for Burnaby-Douglas, John Richards, Professor, Public Policy Program, Simon Fraser University and Walter Piovesan, Maps/Data/GIS Librarian, Simon Fraser University.

Additionally, IPC members initiated and assisted in the authoring of a letter to the federal government regarding the census long form. Signed by BCLA President Marjorie Mitchell, the letter to Industry Minister Tony Clement in August expresses BCLA's concern over the abandonment of the long form and called for its reinstatement. The minister's response is posted on the BCLA website.

At the time of writing, a motion in the House of Commons passed by opposition parties at the end of September to reinstate the long form was ignored by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. A day later, Liberal MP Carolyn Bennett introduced a private member's bill that also calls for the reinstatement of the mandatory long form. However, it is unlikely the bill will be discussed prior to the Census 2011 forms being sent to the printers.

FOIPPA

IPC co-chairs Carla Graebner and Devon Greyson wrote BCLA's submission to the B.C. government for the 2010 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act review.

Among the many recommendations, BCLA called for the greater dissemination of government information, the creation of a provincial government library depository program, and the archiving of online information created by government. The letter also expressed BCLA's concern that "the Act has been severely weakened over the past eighteen years, and now has fallen behind many other jurisdictions in ensuring open governance and transparent decision making for B.C. citizens."

The provincial government is required to review the act every six years. Publication consultations closed in March, with the government releasing its report soon after.

Canada's Digital Economy

IPC members were also involved in the federal government's Digital Economy public consultation process in June. In short, the government collected ideas, thoughts, and submissions about how Canada's digital future should look. The BCLA made a submission that concentrated on net neutrality. The submission discusses libraries' roles in the digital economy and how a non-neutral net can compromise that role. The submission also called for legislation to ensure net neutrality.

5 things to know about net neutrality

Net neutrality is an ongoing issue and discussion in Canada. Here are five things you need to know about net neutrality:

1. It's about equal access to content on the Internet: on a neutral net, all information can be accessed at the same speed. The only differentiation is the user's internet connection, not the content.
2. Federal regulators are addressing net neutrality: after public consultation in 2009, the CRTC developed an internet management traffic policy.

3. The main idea that supports net neutrality is the legal concept of "common carrier." Common carriers include communications networks such as the postal and telephone networks.

4. Internet service providers have "throttled" access to information. Examples include Telus blocking access to a union website during a 2005 labour dispute.

5. BCLA passed a net neutrality resolution in 2008.

Some net neutrality reading:

- Guidon, A., & Dennie D. (2010) Net neutrality in Canada and what it means for libraries.

Partnership: the Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research, 5.

- Greyson, D. (2010). Net neutrality: A Library Issue. *Feliciter 56*(2), pp. 57-59.
- Open Media

In the near future:

Plans are in the works for a variety of salons that will explore information policy issues in a relaxed and informative environment.

Leanna Jantzi is a Librarian at Okanagan College in Kelowna, B.C.