

# Media democracy and libraries

By Sylvia Roberts.

BCLA is one of the many sponsors of Media Democracy Days (MDD), which will be held in Vancouver from November 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Shawna Kristin, Co-Chair of BCLA's Information Policy Committee (IPC), explains that in 2003, BCLA began formally endorsing MDD by passing a resolution at the BCLA AGM

(<http://www.bcla.bc.ca/ipc/Resolutions/2003-resolution-media-conc-passed.pdf>).

As stated in the resolution, BCLA supports the foundational ideas of Media Democracy Days, including the following: "freedom of the press and public access to diverse media and information are a prerequisite to a functioning democracy"; "public interest is served by the availability of a broadly diverse range of viewpoints and one of the fundamental tenets and responsibilities of libraries is to both facilitate and foster this availability"; "libraries are the primary social institutions with responsibility to assure the broadest possible availability of a wide range of ideas and information".

## What is media democracy?

The 2011 MDD [website](#) states that MDD "is about democratization both through the media, and of the media. This means using the media for democratic self-governance; and reshaping the media themselves to make them more accessible, accountable, representative."

Media democracy promotes mass media reform, support for strong public broadcasters, development and participation in alternative media, citizen journalism and other forms of resistance to the increasing dominance of corporate media.

## Why is media democracy important?

Media democracy advocates for a range of news, opinions and entertainment, leading to a more informed citizenry, as well as a more enlightened, representative, informative public discourse.

Increased concentration of media ownership has led to a reduction in the range of voices and opinions expressed in the mass media. Increased commercialization of news and information content has led to a reduction in investigative reporting



Image: [Media Democracy Days: Vancouver](#)

in the public interest. In Canada, the past decade has seen several media corporate mergers and takeovers, limiting news diversity, reduced support for the CBC and diminishing federal support for print media.

Alternative and citizen media enable individuals to produce and disseminate information and opinions that are marginalized by mainstream media, without the pressure of advertisers and politicians.

## What is the Media Democracy Days event?

MDD marks its 10th anniversary this year as a forum for citizens, activists, media makers, students, academics and policy makers to share their ideas and actions towards a more democratic media.

The MDD program includes film showings, seminars, workshops and a media fair, an exhibition of local, alternative, non-commercial and innovative media production. The event brings together a number of diverse communities, and helps promote the cause of media democratization to a much wider public.

The MDD [website](#) states: "Throughout its history MDD has approached the project of media democratization with a three-pronged ambition:

- Know the media by engaging in critical, progressive, cross-cultural, and intergenerational policy dialogue

- Be the media by working directly with local media makers to produce messages that intervene in cultural and political life
- Change the media by collaborating with community members to create progressive coalitions and actionable political goals."

### Why is the Media Democracy Days event important?

MDD seeks to build a vibrant local network of reformers (as a resource for campaigns, events), a community (sense of shared belonging), and a social movement (working collectively towards common goals).

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### Who participates in Media Democracy Days?

Media Democracy Days is a partnership between Vancouver Public Library, Open Media and the Simon Fraser University School of Communication. A wide range of sponsors, supporters and media partners also contribute (see <http://mediademocracyday.org/about/2011-sponsors-and-supporters/>).

Attendees include citizens, activists, journalists, artists, students, academics, filmmakers, policy makers and librarians.

Participants in the media fair include Adbusters, Rabble.ca, The Tyee, Pacific Cinematheque, Vivo Media Arts Centre, CJSF, CITR, Ricepaper, Indo-Canadian Times, Out in Schools, and many more proponents of alternative media. For a complete list, see <http://mediademocracyday.org/2011-programming-info/media-fair-participants-2011/>.

### How does media democracy/the lack of media democracy impact libraries?

Canadian libraries are democratic institutions that offer unrestricted access to information in support of people's studies, work and other interests. Libraries play an important role in civil society and engagement by serving as a channel for information about political and social issues, encouraging community debate of public problems, and helping people make choices.

Librarians have always spoken up for intellectual freedom, fair dealing, information equity, providing information to serve the interests of all our users and to presenting all points-of-view on issues, just as we have taken stands on censorship and book banning, Internet filtering, the digital divide, and other issues affecting users' access to information.

The BCLA's Information Policy Committee (IPC) has long been associated with MDD and with educational and advocacy activities relating to media democracy. The BCLA membership passed resolutions on media democracy at the 2003 and 2007 Annual General Meetings.

### How can libraries support media democracy?

Through physical collections and web site linking, librarians make decisions about the types of sources their patrons can access. Libraries should take pains to provide access to alternative and independent points-of-view, in order to serve the interests of all members of our communities. B.C. libraries should also seek out opportunities to work with local, regional and alternate publishers to deepen and broaden their collections.

Part of the 2003 BCLA resolution on media democracy suggests that B.C. libraries engage in public education activities, such as displays, web sites and programmes that highlight the media democracy issues affecting their specific communities.

Members of the IPC put together a web page with resources for BC libraries to support the planning of MDD events (still available at <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/bcla-ip/mediademocracyday>) such as:

- Display library collection materials from small presses, independently produced videos or music recordings
- Develop a bookmark for Media Democracy Day, listing URLs or print sources for further information
- Set up an interactive space (white board, flip chart) near your displays, soliciting input from your user community. Ask questions like: Where do you get your news? List local media outlets and have people mark which ones they use.
- Arrange a screening of independent videos from Moving Images, NFB, etc.
- Put on a party or fundraiser for independent radio, television, community networks, etc.
- Have a staff study session to discuss ways to ensure the library represents a multiplicity of voices from the community

- Have a children's art session on ideas related to communications democracy and what it means; hang the art in the library

### **Why should library workers attend Media Democracy Days?**

Media Democracy Day is a chance for library workers to reflect upon, and educate ourselves and our patrons on a wide range of issues which affect/involve libraries: the importance of non-commercial, local and independent media, national and international cultural policy initiatives, the scope of conglomeration and consolidation in media,

globalisation and media, media literacy, Internet governance, and more.

### **Where can I learn more about media democracy?**

Visit the official web site for Media Democracy Days 2011 in Vancouver at <http://mediademocracyday.org> to learn more about media democracy, the event's program schedule, speakers, and more.

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