**For Libraries: Accessible Book Production Government Funding Information Session**

# Transcript

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Thank you very much.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

For joining us today and for spending some of your time with us, we're very appreciative of your support and interest.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I'm Laurie Davidson.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I'm the executive director of CELA and Kevin Millsap, who is the executive director of the BC Libraries Coop.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

What we want to do today is just provide for everyone.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Here is some information about.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Sort of what we've been going through over the last month, so we'll start with a brief introduction of what our organizations do, and then we'll go over.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Sort of the status and history of sort of the announced funding cuts that we heard about sort of late in 2020, and then our advocacy campaign and the results of that. I want to share some information with you on sort of the government's plan for what they call transition to industry and why.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Fill all of the gaps and why we need to, you know.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Continue to work with the federal government to get long term sustainable.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Funding and then we'll end with discussing the response to the campaign and what our next steps are, so that's what we hope to kind of go through with you today for about 15 or 20 minutes in Kevin's. In my remarks. And then we'll have about 10 minutes or so for questions. We're going to try to wrap this up in 30 minutes and so will end at that half hour.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

OK, so so to begin, as many of you know, Nels and Sheila, both our national not, for profit organisations that offer accessible reading services to people with print disabilities.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I always do this in all of my presentations to say that print disabilities include those who are blind or low vision. Those who have physical disabilities which can impact a person's ability to read or manipulate a physical book and also includes those who have learning or cognitive disabilities, which includes something such as dyslexia.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Both of our organizations produce and distribute accessible books, and this can include a number of different formats including Braille audiobooks as well as accessible E books, and we distribute those books to people with print disabilities in Canada through our network of Canadian public libraries.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

The other piece is that we were also work with publishers and other stakeholders on training and awareness of of Accessibility, and we make sure that issues of accessible read.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And services around Accessible reading are offered to people with print disabilities in Canada, so together we provide a critical and necessary public service, and it's a critical and necessary national public service to ensure equitable access to reading for the estimated 3,000,000 people in Canada with print disabilities.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So I'm not going to hand it over to Kevin, who will talk a little bit about the history of how we got to where we are and the status of our campaign.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Thanks Laurie, and thanks everybody for joining in.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

I'm calling to you today from the territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh people.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

And I live in a place colonially known as Vancouver's West End. So a little bit of recent history. On Tuesday, March 16th, Minister Qualtrough's office released a statement that you may have.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Seen announcing that they were reinstating $1,000,000 of funding for the upcoming fiscal year. So 2021 to 2022 for NNELS and CELA and so with this what this means is with this reinstatement of $1,000,000 really what it means is there will be no cuts.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

This coming fiscal, so beginning in April 1st, that's what that additional $1,000,000 means. There's been a few questions about exactly what that is referring to. We are.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We're really grateful for the reinstatement of these funds, and we want to say that there's no way this would have happened without the incredible support that has been shown by users, friends and family of users, folks working in libraries, library boards, municipalities and members of the general public.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

As well, the support has actually truly been astonishing and gratifying.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

To see, and it's it's surpassed, I think what we were anticipating.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

It's also important for us to note, though, that this $1,000,000 really. All it means is the funding for next year beginning. April 1st will be $4 million for this work. Nationally, the funding this year has been $4 million, so it's staying the same. It means no cuts. We have a reprieve.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

For one year, so we do have a lot of work to do with our organizations over the next few months to try to ensure long term funding sustainability.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Now let me go just a little further back in history. In November of last year, the federal government's fall economic statement came out and it included a statement that current annual funding for this work from the federal government, so that $4 million was going to be declining by $1,000,000 a year.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

For each of the the next preceding four years, getting eventually to 0 by 2024-2025. So we were anticipating a cut of 25% per year for each of the next four years, eventually getting to no federal government funding, so we had not received advanced notice.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

That this was going to happen, it took us.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

It took us all by surprise.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So we did have a number of meetings in January and February with federal government staff, including people in Minister Qualtrough's office. They were good meetings at one level, but there was never an indication in any of those conversations with federal government staff that there was any movement on the side of the federal government.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

To stop going ahead with the cuts.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So we realized that we really felt like we had no choice.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So we launched the awareness and advocacy campaign that all of you probably saw and many of you we think took part in.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So thank you for that.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We launched that on March 4th and then the following week within one week we were able to secure a meeting.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

With the minister, so we had a phone call on the next Monday and the good news was on that called administer. Let us know that they were going to not go ahead with cuts for this coming year, so they were reinstating where they were going to add $1,000,000 to the three million that had been allocated for the upcoming year, bringing us back.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Bringing a school back to 4,000,000 so.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So no reduction in federal funding for this coming year. I do that statement also mentioned $10 million plus $1,000,000 and some folks have asked what is that all about? So we just want to break that down that $10 million in the fall. Sorry in the press release included the $4 million for the fiscal year that we are currently in.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Yeah, so that wasn't a commitment of new money. It was a restatement of money that had already been allocated between the two organizations. And then the plus 1,000,000 is really not going ahead with cuts for next year. So at this point in time, if there were to be no changes, we would be anticipating a 50% cut in federal funding.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

To this $4 million on below for the fiscal year of 2022-2023. Obviously we don't want that to happen, but that you know that that's currently this a choice.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Patient, we know that the minister has been a fantastic support for this work and believes in this work.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

She told us that on the call she is very supportive of people in Canada with print disabilities and she let us know that she's very active within the federal government.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Signed on advocating for funding for this work and how important it is to her.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So she also made it clear to us on that call.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

That she was opening to continuing the conversation with related stakeholders to come up with a long term strategy for a funding solution for accessible reading in Canada.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So I'm going to press pause there and end it back to Laurie.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Thanks Kevin.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Some of the other information that some of you may have read that came out in the news release from the federal government when they announced the reinstatement of the of the 1,000,000 for this coming year is that they stated their strategy going forward for accessible reading is to support a transition to industry for the production of born accessible books. So I think it's worth just speaking a little bit to what.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

What that means and what they're referring to and how NNELS CELA participate in that in that framework, and in that land.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

OK, so we know that in 2019 the federal government announced an investment of 22.8 million /, 5 years for the development of an initiative to support the sustainable production and distribution of accessible digital books by Canadian Independent Publishers. So This is Money that will flow through the Canada.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Book fun through the Department of Canadian Heritage and with the goal of enhancing publishers capacity and distributors capacity to ensure that books are born, accessible and are part of the digital production process.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

For a definition of born accessible books, it really means that books are made accessible from the beginning by publishers, and they can be accessed by everyone without the need for remediation so they can be accessed with assistive technologies, including screen readers and Braille displays.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

At the time of creation.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

The initiative coming out of the Canada Book Fund is market focused and it is intended to shift the supply of accessible books to a system where accessible books are commercially available at the time of publication.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And we know that the Association of Canadian Publishers ACP.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

As well as E bound and many other Canadian publishing entities have been doing a lot of work over the last two years.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

With this funding in in assessing the current market landscape of accessible books in making recommendations for the implementation of a national certification program for Accessible Books and for providing training and awareness about accessible books.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Two publishers.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So I think it's important to note that both CELA and NNELS organisations fully support the transition to born Accessible books within industry.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

You know, with this funding, Canada is being recognized as a leader worldwide in this area in publishing, so it's a tremendous initiative and we we supported.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

But we were not aware that this funding that the federal government was giving to the independent publishing industry through the Canada Book Fund, that the intent of this was to replace our funding.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And that funding is for not for profit organizations to provide equitable access to reading for people with print disabilities. So I think this is an important thing to understand about the federal government's announcement on their transition to industry. That I think that leaves out some really important conversations and that there's some gaps in there.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Overall service and then the overall landscape of Accessible Publishing.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So recognizing the importance that publishers have to play in this landscape, we've had NNELS, and Cilla have had conversations with the publishing industry with the fall economic statement's announcement to really try to understand what the cuts for NNELS in ceiling mean for the publishing industry and the industry.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

What we have heard from publishers is that they will never be able to fill all of the gaps even if they get to a place where all new books in Canada are born accessible, there still will be gaps in service that only not for profit organisations like seal and NNELS will be able to fill.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So there really is a need for a more fulsome solution an A long term funding strategy that will include both industry both the publishing industry and not for profit organizations like ourselves.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So it's crucial to understand that there are gaps that will never be fully filled by industry and that really this isn't an issue for us too, about inclusion.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And equity.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So I'm I'll read you some of the reasons or some of these gaps that that we're looking at it needing funding on going and sustained federal funding to make sure that we fill it. So, for instance, it is estimated that only currently 7 to 10% of published content worldwide is available in accessible formats. So though the Canadian independent publishing industry.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Can go some way in making sure that all of their titles are accessible there still will be a great amount.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Of content that will not be made accessible.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

This could include backlist titles that will yet need to be made accessible.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

It could include smaller publishers who don't have the capacity for publishing accessible books, and it could include content from international publishers and multinational publishers and much more.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

A second piece for both NNELS and CELA is that we believe that access to reading materials is crucial to economic, academic and economic success and also that social inclusion supports mental health and wellness.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

This is particularly true during the pandemic, where isolation is a real issue for those with disability.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So now sencilla.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Distribute books to people with disabilities.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

These folks are already people who face social and economic barriers and therefore the distribution of books is a service that industry will never be able to fulfill.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

That even if accessible books are made available through commercial.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Supply chains, which is important that those books are accessible there still will always need to be this not for profit accessible reading service.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Thirdly, Bocilla now support diversity of format to meet the diverse reading needs of those with print disabilities, and this can include Braille audiobooks, Daisy formats and accessible ebooks.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So it's essential that these services continue to be available to ensure that everyone has access to reading in the format and delivery method of their choice using the technology that is available to them.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And these formats, particularly when you get into specialized formats like Braille.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

These formats will never be fully filled by industry either.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And Lastly, I just want to speak to the federal government's commitment that it made to the Marrakesh Treaty in 2016. If for organisations like NNELS and CELA who do the Canadian production, an exchange of titles worldwide that cuts to our funding will impact Canada's ability to support these commitments to people with print disabilities at home.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And around the world.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

So CELA and NNELS both were seeking long term sustainable federal funding for this sector to to ensure that we can continue to provide equitable access to reading while at the same time working with our publishing friends to help them move towards the Born Accessible goal.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

And now I'll hand it over to Kevin for campaign response.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Just go.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Just a little bit on next steps, 'cause we're also getting questions on that now that we have this reprieve.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So the campaign has been successful in a number of ways.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

It's raised awareness with politicians across the political spectrum, which is fantastic and within the broader community, beyond the user groups and beyond libraries themselves.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Which is very important.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We don't want to lose this momentum entirely, and so if you have already been in touch, perhaps with your Member of Parliament, you might consider reaching out again, thanking them for this reprieve, reprieve, and reminding them that there needs to be sustained funding and a long term federal funding solution.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

For this work, if you have a letter and process, we know that a number of library boards have recently given permission for letters to be sent.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Then we would encourage you to to still go ahead with that letter and input in their wording around thanking the government for the one year reprieve.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

And letting them know that there is still need for ongoing conversation and dialogue to come up with a long term federal funding solution based on our conversations with the Minister, the next steps for us are to engage with them and some external stakeholders in a dialogue to figure out the way forward about how we build an equitable reading system in Canada.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

To ensure that we have sustainable funding for this work, we've started conversations as Laurie mentioned, with some of the publisher groups.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We're looking forward to working with him on on a long term strategy, so we're also committing to keep our various stakeholder groups informed.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

As these conversations unfold as well, because what we don't want to be is we don't want to be in this same position next February because it was also having to put anyone through.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

This is very stressful.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We don't if we can avoid it.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We don't want to have to do this again.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

That's good.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

You'll see draft template letters on the CELA website on the Nils website up to date.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So if you are still working on a letter, you can get some language.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

There, so that's it for me.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

I think I'm passing it back to Lindsey at this point.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Right, thanks Kevin and Laurie.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So we have a few minutes for questions from from all of you participating today.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So if you have a question, you can probably best just to put it in the chat if you're able.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

If you're on Har.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Phone phone you can raise your hand and I will.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Look for you and then you can unmute yourself so to raise your hand it's turn.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

I unmuted star 6.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

And so, and if you want to speak your question, you could join a device computer, whatever.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

You can raise your hand.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

And also I'm yourself if you prefer.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So I did see that there were a few questions in the chat already, so one is, I think, John Harris.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

I think you had said that your question was.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Answered, but if that's not the case.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Let us know and we can go back to it.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

There's a question from I believe Jennifer, about.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

What are other countries doing in terms of funding?

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I'm I can take that Jennifer briefly.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I mean, there's lots of different models across the world for how funding is given to accessible reading services and national libraries for the blind, low vision or printers, or people with printer.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Abilities, so there's many different models out there, certainly to our neighbors.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

To the South they have a very well funded federal program that they work through the state libraries within the United States.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

In some of the other countries in the UK, some of them are more led by charitable organisations such as RNIB.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

In the UK, so there's really a variety of models out there worldwide.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

OK, so there done.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Did want to have their question about some specifics around formats so.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Wondering about access to new publications at the same time as as people who can access, print and then also access to a human narrated audio.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So I'm guessing the question is.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

You know that that the the funding is important to him.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So how do we?

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

How do we make those decisions happen to enable that?

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Now I can.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I can try that one too.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

I think one of the.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

One of the key advantages of the born accessible paradigm within industry is that, of course, if the formats are accessible from the get go, that's then accessible formats available at the same time as the general release of the publication, and this is obviously a great step forward and a positive piece.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

It also allows us as organisations to get those accessible content and add them to our repositories s at the same time as general release. So I think it's really worth supporting in terms of human narrated. Again, the the growth in audiobooks in the commercial sector.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Makes it that there's many more titles now available in human narrated audiobook format, but in addition, we do a great deal of production work by creating accessible human narrated audiobooks.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

If there isn't already a human narrated version of that, so that's a great deal of the.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Of the the work, the production work that we do to make sure that human aerated content is available, and that's using the federal funds.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

There's a quest go.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Ahead, go ahead, Lindsay.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

So just going to say there's a question about what options exist for creating efficiencies to reduce the overall demand for federal funding.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

I can take that, and there's another one that I think is linked, so we're already working together and have been across the two services for awhile now.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

It really excited accelerated when when Reiner was at the CELA Helm and has just continued.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Hi Ryan, I great to see you with with Laurie.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

In terms of we do joint purchasing together and we purchased materials that then go into both repository's. So we're using public dollars once, where we're also having a discussion with Heritage Canada around a similar approach, or for the use of some of those funds.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So I I want to just point something out that $4 million per year.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

In a budget, the size of the federal government's is a rounding error. Someone sneezed and the decimal point landed at $4 million. That is, nothing that is absolutely nothing. So when we're talking about such a tiny amount of money for one in 10 people in this country with a print disability, and that number will increase.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

It's only going to increase.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We feel like we have to have an ecosystem type approach to this work that publishers are a part of.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

That NNELS or is a part of an Etsy.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

There's a part of men together, will have a holistic system, so the reason I'm framing it that way, there's another question there about.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

In a worst case scenario, you know, would we contemplate perhaps a private nonprofit model just were not there?

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Yet in that kind of conversation, what I mean by that is we had an indication from the Minister.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

In fact, it was her suggestion at first, not ours.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Although we were going to ask for it for an ongoing conversation to find a long term stable federal funding so.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Solution and so our focus is going to be there first because we approach this as a public service.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

If government is underfunding say, public schools or health care or water provision, my default is not to figure out how we can turn that over even to a private nonprofit.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

But it is to advocate for government to fulfill its public responsibility.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

And we frame this work as an essential public.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

If it's so we're talking about such a small amount of money for $1,000,000 a year, that's there in the federal government, we've seen anything in the past year. We've seen that federal government when it has the will, will make away. And so that's our message back to the federal government. On on this funding question.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

Right we have.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

About a minute, if there's any don't see any last questions, but if there is one, now is your chance.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

I just scanned through for the phone folks.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

OK, see none.

**Lindsay Tyler (CELA)**

I'll pass it back to you, Kevin.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

OK, well that's it gang we're done.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Thank you so much for giving other time midday or end of day wherever you are.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

We will be keeping in touch with you as we understand how the conversation with the federal government is going to progress.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

And I just want to say this, my fervent hope.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

Is it?

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

But we don't get to a place again where we're asking everybody to email and client.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

You're here empty, and so are we may be reaching out to you throughout the year.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

You know to do some strategizing and somewhere together about this is what we think we can do to avoid that outcome by maybe sending some notes now.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So you'll hear from us we're going to keep you updated.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

That's our commitment to you.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

And thank you so so much for everything you've done to get us to this point, which is incredible.

**Kevin Millsip (NNELS)**

So again, thank you all for your time.

**Laurie Davidson (CELA)**

Yep, and I would say thank you again for all of your support and appreciate your time today.