

Public libraries key information highway on-ramps

Leacy O'Brien, Canadian Library Association

A new study conducted by Ekos Research Associates confirms the growing importance of Canadian public libraries as access points to the 'information highway'. The study, entitled *Canadians, public libraries and the information highway*, was commissioned by the Canadian Library Association (CLA) on behalf of an informal consortium comprised of Industry Canada, provincial and territorial libraries, the National Library of Canada and l'Association pour l'avancement des sciences et des techniques de la documentation (ASTED).

The survey was conducted over three months and included 1271 Canadian respondents. The findings are intended to assist governments in planning the broader goal of connecting all public libraries to the internet and to examine the means by which such connectedness can be sustained.

'The findings of the study confirm that public libraries continue to be both a major information resource and an equaliser in making information accessible,' says Canadian national librarian Marianne Scott.

The study examined public perception of the emerging role of public libraries as public access sites. According to the study:

- public libraries top the list of appropriate locations for public access sites.
- seven out of ten respondents believe that on-site access to the internet is an appropriate role for public libraries.
- sixty-six per cent of those surveyed indicated support for libraries as a resource for training on how to use the internet and fully utilise search engines.

- a majority of respondents (sixty per cent) view public libraries as having a role to play in the provision of locally produced Canadian internet content.

Canada's public libraries welcome the survey findings as evidence of public endorsement of their campaign for government and community support for the establishment of sustainable sites for public access to the internet in libraries across the country.

'The report provides real facts on how people find information and the important and changing role of libraries in the emerging knowledge based economy,' said Marian Pape, Nova Scotia provincial librarian.

The report is available on the LibraryNet website at <http://www.schoolnet.ca/ln-rb/> ■

Australian Library and Information Association

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Application information is available ALIA National Office, PO Box E441, Kingston 2604 phone 02 6285 1877, fax 02 6282 2249 e-mail awards@alia.org.au URL <http://www.alia.org.au/awards/>

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