December 2, 2009

London Public Library
Attn: Board Chair
251 Dundas Street
London, ON N6A 6H9

Dear Board Chair:

Just four years ago the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, a not-for-profit, member organization was created to provide a single, strong voice for public libraries in Ontario.

We are unique. We are not an agency of government, nor are we a professional association, or an administrators’ group providing services to various types of libraries. We are a collective of public libraries working together through the CEO and Board Chair to advance public library policies and programs provincially through a variety of advocacy, marketing and research activities.

Although our young organization has only begun to fulfill its broad and important mandate, we are particularly proud of our accomplishments over the past year. We have strengthened the Federation’s relationships with key decision makers and partners, and have taken advantage of opportunities to tell funders, the media and the general public how public libraries are indispensable to the economic growth and the quality of life of our communities. We have also undertaken various research initiatives that are building our case for support. Listed on the next few pages are our significant accomplishments over the past year or so.

We need to maintain our momentum. Having an organization advocating on your behalf is especially important this year as many of your libraries face serious budget constraints. Because membership fees represent the Federation’s principal revenue source, your continued support is crucial to the viability and effectiveness of our organization. Only through your ongoing involvement can we work with you, and for you, as we speak with “One Voice for Ontario Public Libraries”.

A few weeks ago, we mailed the 2010 membership renewal form to your CEO. If your library has not already done so, we would ask that you make any necessary changes to the form and return it at your earliest convenience. Payment of 2010 membership fees must be received by February 24, 2010 for you to be in attendance at the Annual General Meeting.

With your ongoing membership and support and that of 185 fellow libraries, the Federation has a very bright future.

Sincerely,

David Allen
Chief Executive Officer
Recent Achievements

i) Advocacy

- Achieved consensus among our diverse membership on an Advocacy Plan that identifies the priority issues, and specifies the target audience, messaging and approach for dealing with each issue.

- Hosted a well attended reception at Queen’s Park for MPPs, which provided an excellent forum to voice issues directly with policy makers. Developed a handout describing our key messages.

- Issued a frequently quoted media release and letter to the Ministers of Finance and Culture, which stressed the importance of safeguarding funding to public libraries because their utilization increases dramatically during periods of economic downturn.

- Advised members on dealing with Bill 128 and Bill 202, private member’s bills that propose mandatory Internet screening in all public libraries.

- Submitted recommendations to government on a proposed Information and Communication Accessibility Standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which have since been incorporated in the revised standard.

- Consulted members at a very early stage on how the $15 million grant flowing through Southern Ontario Library Services should be spent, and shared their comments with the Ministry.

ii) Marketing

- Cultivated partnerships and increased the Federation’s profile in the sector through frequent meetings with stakeholders, regular communiqués to members, and participation in collaborative projects such as Knowledge Ontario’s Advocacy Campaign, Libraries 2020 Symposium, and Accessible Technologies Study.

- Invested in a consulting study to develop a marketing plan that targets funders and policy makers.

- Received approval from the Ministry of Culture to take responsibility for the dates, themes, promotional material and celebrations of Ontario Public Library Week, a key lever for profile-raising. Coordinated preparations for 2008 and 2009.
• Was an exhibitor at the conferences of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in 2008 and 2009, which served as efficient vehicles for connecting with hundreds of municipal funders and potential members and for promoting the value of public libraries. Developed new promotional materials specifically for these conferences.

• Developed plans to reorganize the Federation’s website in order to provide easier, access to news and reference materials for members and the general public.

iii) Research

• Conducted a research study to determine the scope of literacy programs currently being delivered through Ontario’s public libraries. Secured financial support through the Library Services Development Fund.

• Organized a pre-conference session at the 2009 convention of the Ontario Library Association, which examined funding models used in other provinces and states in North America. Identified several best practices that could be used in future recommendations to government.

• Conducted a membership survey to quantify the increase in library utilization caused by Ontario’s recession, which legitimized our claim that public library utilization increases dramatically during periods of economic downturn.

• Oversaw a study that analyzed why public library utilization by those over age 55 dropped from 64% in 2000 to 58% in 2005, according to previous market research commissioned by the Federation. Explained the decline as replacement behaviour due to this population’s adoption of the Internet.

iv) Operations & Member Services

• Negotiated the transfer of responsibility for the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council from Ontario Library Services North.

• Negotiated with chief executives of large urban libraries to reconstitute their networking group as a working committee of the Federation’s Board.

• Compiled and circulated a list of potential sources of capital/infrastructure funding and how to apply. Convinced Infrastructure Canada to reverse (in our favour) its original ruling on members’ eligibility for the not-for-profit intake.

• Conducted membership drives that increased the number of paid up Federation members from 175 to 180, despite the current economic climate.

• Conducted an assessment of alternative models for the membership fee structure, which concluded that the current model, while not perfect, is the best option.