Influence and Increased Funding in Canadian Public Libraries: The Case of Alberta in Fiscal Year 2009–10

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory case study examined the role of social influence in the decision-making process to increase public library funding in the Canadian province of Alberta in the 2009–10 fiscal year. Using Robert Cialdini's theory of factors of influence (i.e., commitment and consistency, authority, liking, social proof, scarcity, and reciprocity) as a framework for analysis, findings show that consistency and commitment and authority were relevant and that liking was also important. These findings are consistent with Cialdini's theory, which suggests that the quality of relationships is one factor that can most strongly influence a decision maker. This study gives insight into the factors motivating those involved in public library funding allocation decisions. No prior studies have examined the construct of influence in decision making about funding for public libraries at any level of government.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the role of social influence on decision makers during the budget-setting process in the case of the Canadian province of Alberta in the 2009–10 fiscal year. Despite the economic restraint experienced in other jurisdictions during this period, this provincial government increased its allocation for public libraries by 40 percent over the previous year. Using case study methodology, a series of semistructured interviews with elected officials and senior bureaucrats was undertaken. Supported by data from primary and secondary sources, the results were analyzed to determine whether any of the six tactics of social influence, as identified by Robert Cialdini (i.e, commitment and consistency, authority, liking, social proof, scarcity, and reciprocity; 2001), were instrumental in these budget processes.

Problem Statement

While discussions in the professional and research literature of librarianship increasingly focus on funding and the tenuous economic circumstances affecting library budgets (e.g.,

Brey-Casiano 2006; McClure, Feldman, and Ryan 2007; Maxwell 2008; Chamberlain 2009; Gibbons 2009; Moorman 2009; Richards 2009; Storey 2010), there are few studies exploring the reasons for increases or decreases in public library funding allocation decisions. Generally, the existing research literature on public library funding (Robbins-Carter 1984; Blake 1988; Estabrook and Lanker 1995; Hubbard 1996; Allen 2003; Bailey 2007; Varheim, Steinmo, and Ide 2008) has given little insight into the factors that motivate those elected politicians and other high-level actors involved in the budget decision-making process. While there appears to be no correlation between public demand for library services and increased funding (Allen 2003; Varheim et al. 2008), intrinsic factors like the actions and preferences of individual decision makers can control the outcome of the funding process (Bailey 2007), and external factors like local socioeconomic and educational levels of the community can also have a correlation to higher levels of funding (Blake 1988). This study broadly explored whether these or additional factors influenced elected officials in their decision-making processes at the provincial (state) level, specifically in an instance of increased funding. Further, the role the tactics of social influence played in this positive decision were highlighted.

Research Question

This article discusses the province of Alberta, Canada, in the period leading up to the 2009–10 fiscal year. The data are from a larger study exploring the factors influencing decision-making priorities during the budget process in Canadian provincial governments, as well as whether any of the six tactics of interpersonal influence as identified in the Cialdini framework were employed in these budget processes.

The article examines the jurisdictional circumstances for the public library funding and the external environment in which this decision was made. The broad question posed to set the context for the study was this: What (internal and external) factors in the province of Alberta led elected members responsible for public libraries to recommend increased funding in the 2009–10 budget year?

Because no other research has been undertaken to examine the role of social influence in decision making about public library funding, the central question explores the presence of the tactics of social influence in this process: Which, if any, of the six tactics of interpersonal influence as identified in the Cialdini framework were employed in the 2009–10 budget process in Alberta, and, if so, by whom?

Background and Context

This is a particularly important time for libraries. Public libraries have never been busier, and demands on them have never been higher. Yet funding continues to be an issue. (Pana 2008, 1)

The above quotation represents a view held by many public librarians, library trustees, and others concerned about public libraries across Canada. The decisions leading to annual funding allotments for libraries can be complicated, with many factors influencing the final outcome. The research on influence and decision making shows that creating an impact on a decision maker's perspective, intentions, beliefs, and attitudes is multifaceted and depends on a complex set of variables produced over time rather than a few specific actions taken in response to isolated choices (Tversky and Kahneman 1982; Jensen 2007).

For many public library directors, this uncertainty about the outcomes of the financial decisions of elected officials creates an additional burden in their local planning processes and diminishes scarce time and resources. Indeed, over the past several decades, many senior library managers have devoted time and financial resources to pursuing advocacy campaigns in an effort to stave off budget cuts. In Canada, similar examples cover a range of years and a broad geographical sample (e.g., Pictou Antigonish Regional Library 2008; Steffenhagen 2009; White 2011). Despite evidence from other sectors that most successful campaigns are based on carefully planned, professional communications carried out directly with decision makers (Pross 1992), grassroots campaigns remain popular in the library community. Little formal analysis has been carried out on their efficacy. This study contributes to the literature by examining these funding decisions and the factors that influenced them.

In Canada, funding for public libraries comes from three main sources: municipalities, provinces, and library board–generated funds. In the 2009–10 fiscal year, it was noted that approximately 40 percent in additional funding over the previous fiscal year was directed to public library services in the province of Alberta. These extra dollars also represented a growth of more than 100 percent in terms of the percentage of allocation from the government department in which the provincial library agency was located (i.e., Ministry of Municipal Affairs). This decision seems particularly counterintuitive in a time of global economic recession and exceptional government deficits (Lamphier 2009). As funding levels are not prescribed by legislation, it was unclear how these decisions were made.

Literature Review

A literature review from the disciplines of librarianship, social psychology, and, to a lesser extent, political science was undertaken to explore research focusing on public library funding and public libraries in the political context. The review also aimed to establish a foundation for the study within the concepts of influence and budget-setting as they apply to the political realm. Works were chosen to provide a thorough overview of these concepts and, as a result, it was necessary to include a number of older works. Within the discipline of librarianship, few relevant research studies have been conducted, and the review is comprehensive. Within the other disciplines, only those works that represented seminal studies related to these concepts were selected.

Public Libraries in the Political Context

There are few studies focusing on public libraries in the political sphere and even fewer that touch specifically on budgets, both at the municipal and provincial/state levels. Recent searches in several literature databases show the dearth of research in these areas. This section outlines pertinent studies describing public libraries and the various activities undertaken by stakeholders to exert influence in the political realm, as well as connections between public libraries and funding decisions.

This theory of public choice has shown that increased use does not correlate to increased funding (Allen 2003) and that patrons as a group are able to exercise almost no influence on the local annual budget process with municipal councils (Estabrook and Lanker 1995). Similarly, the role that library board members play in the local political process and resulting budget deliberations is minimal, and moreover it has changed little over time (Robbins-Carter 1984).

In contrast, external competing pressures, such as partisan initiatives and caucus colleagues, have been more powerful influences on decision makers during the budget process than the effectiveness of library programs or pressure from library stakeholders (Hubbard 1996). Factors such as local socioeconomic and educational levels of the community, or indeed the actual country, may also correlate to higher levels of funding (Blake 1988; Varheim et al. 2008).

Numerous studies have focused on the image, credibility, and perception of libraries by decision makers. Significant studies in this area have been undertaken in the United States (Garceau 1949; Shavit 1986; Ward 2004), Scandinavia (Kann-Christensen and Pors 2004; Aundunson 2005; Koren 2009), the United Kingdom (Usherwood 1994), and Australia (Smith and Usherwood 2003, 2004), and key findings discuss the gap in the perception of libraries between librarians themselves and politicians. In one case (Kann-Christensen and Pors 2004), the inability of librarians to adapt library programs and services to meet the demands of changing government mandates resulted in decreased credibility. A comprehensive review of studies on public library funding concludes that an individual's personality can have an effect on those making funding decisions; those library stakeholders holding favor with elected officials were those who had the greatest impact on those decisions (Shavit 1986). Complementing this assertion, the personal value system of the decision maker was the most salient factor in determining school library funding in a recent case in Maryland (Bailey 2007). Additionally, the sense of local librarians having a positive relationship with their state library counterparts was an essential factor in building and maintaining the credibility of those library stakeholders forwarding requests to the legislature; when these two groups disagreed, their requests were more readily dismissed (Ward 2004).

Within the Canadian context, Diane Mittermeyer (1990, 1994, 1999) has written most extensively on the role of libraries in the political context. Her work has centered on the

interplay between public library stakeholders (in both integrated municipal and autonomous board-type settings) and elected municipal officials (e.g., council members and mayors). In a particularly relevant study, the public library board was examined, as a body, in terms of its influence on elected municipal officials. It was noted that the existence of the library board provided some benefits to the organization, such as raising the profile of the library with the public; however, persuading city administration in budget matters was not one of these benefits (Mittermeyer 1999). Concurring with other Canadian and international research (Shavit 1985; Hubbard 1996; Kann-Christensen and Pors 2004; Smith and Usherwood 2004; Aundunson 2005; Gazo 2011), Mittermeyer found a gap in the perception of the most important roles and services offered by the public library as seen by elected leaders and professional librarians.

Copious reports describing actions taken by library advocates in Canada and beyond appear in the literature of librarianship; it would be difficult to create an exhaustive list. In the grassroots category, many declare that the survival of the public library as an institution depends on library staff members informing the public about library services (Maxwell 2008; Chamberlain 2009; Moorman 2009). In Kentucky, this was accomplished by a wide-scale campaign using billboards and other forms of advertising (Gibbons 2009). Interestingly, though this campaign was labeled "successful," state and federal funding for public libraries in that state has been decreasing over the past several years (Kentucky Libraries and Archvies 2009). Others suggest that direct lobbying, particularly through the development of strong relationships with decision makers, can be effective in influencing funding decisions (Brey-Casiano 2006; Chamberlain 2009; Moorman 2009; Storey 2010). However, advocacy campaigns (based largely on a definition rooted in promotion of services) carried out by libraries independent of the development of strong relationships with local politicians have little effect (McClure et al. 2007).

The preceding section explored the literature of public libraries as it intersects in key areas related to the study question: funding, perceptions of the public library by decision makers, and the efficacy of actions taken by library stakeholders to insert themselves in the political sphere. While each of these studies contributes to the discussion on decisions about funding for public libraries, none have focused on the construct of influence through the decision makers' lens. Most significant to this study are those studies concluding that attempts to positively influence budget outcomes were dependent on actions taken at the individual level, whether motivated by the personal values of the decision maker or through existing relationships between key library stakeholders and those holding a position of power.

Social Influence

Models of power and influence have been applied in the political setting in various ways. Some focus on the broader context and policy process (Mazzoni 1991; Kingdon 1995), while others

are well suited to the examination of downward influence (Raven 1990; Yukl, Chavez, and Seifert 2005; Hoy and Smith 2007). Common to these models describing downward influence is the notion that the effectiveness of the tactics used is context dependent (Raven 1990; Koslowsky and Schwarzwald 1993; Cialdini 2001; Yukl et al. 2005).

The framework of influence chosen for analysis in this study comes from Cialdini (2001, 2004). The Cialdini framework is suitable for this study primarily because it considers upward, downward, and lateral appeals. Additionally, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are both encompassed in its description of characteristics, allowing for the most complete analysis of the tactics of influence at the provincial political level. It includes six features: *consistency and commitment, reciprocity, social proof, liking, scarcity, and authority*. Each of these concepts is described below.

- *Consistency and commitment* relate to a target's need to carry through on either previous statements/promises or actions that appear consistent with their values, statements, public beliefs, and so forth. In this study, an example of a public belief may be a party-wide campaign promise on which individual ministers act.
- *Reciprocity* reflects exchange theory and supports the notion that targets are more willing to comply with requests if the agent has had a prior exchange with the target. This can include examples such as favors, gifts, and advice-giving. Surprisingly, Cialdini asserts that an agent may be more successful in influencing a target if the favor was received by the agent rather than given by him or her.
- *Social proof* is the reflection of a decision maker to act in accordance with peers or otherwise accordingly in situations where one option is clearly more socially acceptable than others.
- *Liking* reflects the popular definition of the term—a mutual affinity between the target and the agent—but it may also encompass aspects of the mere exposure theory. In other words, a target may be more likely to feel positively toward an agent upon multiple introductions and interactions. The mere exposure theory further supports the notion that one may find an object or person more attractive as one becomes more familiar with it. Both of these attributes can have a positive effect on influencing the target.
- *Scarcity* refers to the possible lack of availability of an object or service. An everyday example could include the retail sales pitch cliché of "Buy now! They won't last at this price!" In the context of this study, services that may be seen as valuable and hard to obtain are seen to be scarce and, therefore, may be "sold" to funders on that basis.
- *Authority* can refer both to legitimate authority, that is, when an agent has hierarchical or organizational power over a target, or authority of expertise. When

making an appeal, those who are perceived to have genuine knowledge, or the reputation of having genuine knowledge, may be able to make more persuasive arguments.

Budget Theory

Long-standing theories of incrementalism and institutionalism are insufficient to explain the complexity of actual budget practice (Rubin 1990). Several public administration scholars have attempted to close the gap between these overly simplified descriptive theories and normative discussions based on practice. A further debate in this area of scholarship places centers of power alternately on elected officials, senior bureaucrats, pressure groups, and the external environment. It is thus that a more complex theory is sought in this area.

Elected officials have agency in the annual budget process and have indeed been the driving force behind internal process changes (Whicker 1992). A more moderate view of this force posits that the most influential actors on state budget requests are the triumvirate of senior bureaucrats, elected officials, and interest groups, creating a pluralist equilibrium over time. In areas of higher professionalism of legislatures and legislators, requests from senior bureaucrats are more conservative due to increased monitoring, though more aggressive requests correlate to greater increases in departmental funding over the long term (Ryu et al. 2007). External factors selectively influence budgets, though not to the extent of internal budget actors (Ryu et al. 2008). This also shows that incrementalism is inadequate to describe the complexities of the budget process and yet that it continues to carry some explanatory power over the long term (Clark, Clark, and Stanford 1994).

Study Description

In reviewing annual budget estimates for each of the provinces in Canada, a wide range of budget allocations for public libraries was seen for the 2001–10 period. One reason for this is that the formula for and sources of funding for public libraries differ from province to province and include a mix of provincial, municipal, and board-generated funds. The budget estimates also revealed incremental increases in dollars budgeted for provincial agencies that coordinate library services in many provinces over this time period. Exceptions to this general trend occurred in the 2009–10 fiscal year. The province of Alberta budgeted the largest single-year increase of any Canadian provincial grant in the past nine years—approximately 40 percent in additional funding over the previous fiscal year was directed to public library services. This jurisdiction is therefore highlighted in this study as a positive outlier.

To address the broad and central study questions, an exploratory case study was designed to describe an example of a budget decision resulting in increased funding for public libraries at the provincial/state level. The analysis was designed to determine whether there were any salient factors of influence and whether they were in alignment with Cialdini's six tactics

of influence (2001, 2004). The study looked specifically at the point of view of the decision maker, so both upward and lateral appeals were of consideration. The policy process itself was of secondary interest, but the focus was on interpersonal tactics and personal influence and whether they were applicable in the decision-making process.

Between September and November 2011, data for the case study were collected to cover the following themes: political environment, description of the public library context, and the actual outcomes of the decisions. They were collected through interviews with study participants and through the examination of primary and secondary documents. The examination of primary and secondary documents was undertaken to strengthen the authors' ability to substantiate claims and statements from the interview data and to provide further context for the decisions where necessary. Specifically, documents were selected in order to verify financial expenditures and to confirm outcomes as described by interview participants. Primary documentation included legislation, budget estimates, and provincial press releases. Secondary documents, such as articles in the popular media, press releases from libraries, and reports from stakeholder associations, were also examined to complete the case description.

Interviews provided the richest sources of data for the case. Nonstandardized reactive probing techniques based on the subjects' behavior were also employed, that is, creating the probes throughout the interviews based on subjects' responses. Confirmatory (e.g., paraphrasing) and expansive (e.g., "tell me more") probes rounded out the interview techniques. A sample of the unstructured interview schedule is included in the appendix. Questions were formed by the researcher to address several issues and revised subsequent to a pilot study conducted in 2010. The interviews typically opened with introductory comments intended to create an open atmosphere of communication between the researcher and the participant. Questions were then drawn from each section of the schedule, in an order determined in advance of each interview. Minor modifications were made depending on the role the interviewee held within government, for example, titles were changed as appropriate. The pilot study confirmed that the participants were generally more open to providing additional information later in the interview; therefore, at least two questions from each section were covered. The questions were tumbled, focusing on each of the tactics repeatedly. When appropriate, questions were asked to specifically elicit information about the decisions made during the 2009–10 budget process. It was not the researcher's intention to cover all the questions in the schedule in each interview.

In consideration of these political and bureaucratic structures, interviews for this study began with the identification of the most central actor in the decision event (i.e., the minister of municipal affairs, a member of the government cabinet). In this exploratory case study, few participants can provide the depth and richness of information needed to examine fully the unit of analysis in question, that is, the decision about the recommendations regarding public library funding. The elected official, plus his or her deputy (the senior bureaucrat

responsible for the department), could provide the most direct and personal data about sources of influence in the decision-making process. The director of the department or branch responsible for public libraries (similar to a state librarian) was also included in the sample. The importance of separating the deputy and the director in the interview process was confirmed during the pilot study; both were included in the same interview, and they were witnessed catering to each other's perceived contributions. This model of key decision makers in the budget process has also been frequently observed in studies of state budget requests in the United States (Ryu et al. 2007). A total of ten actors were invited to participate. However, several had recently been assigned to new posts following an election, and they declined; five agreed to be interviewed. While the sample size was smaller than desired, the participating actors were a solid representation of the decision-making process by offering a "vertical," or hierarchical, view. It is unclear how a larger sample might have affected the outcome. The breakdown of these actors is as follows: *current and former government cabinet ministers* (four contacted, one participated); *current and former deputy ministers* (two contacted, none participated); and *senior bureaucrats in affiliated departments, including assistant deputy ministers and directors of public library services branches* (four contacted, four participated).

The analyses were carried out on the interview transcripts. Each was coded in two ways, both employing first- and second-cycle methods. The first cycle of analysis used provisional coding (developing codes iteratively) and hypothesis testing. Provisional codes were developed from results of the case study and provided the basis for the initial stages of both interview and document analysis. Care was taken to ensure that new codes were employed as appropriate. The second round of first-cycle coding used a hypothesis testing method, incorporating Cialdini's framework of six tactics of influence and its related assumptions. In these two stages of first-cycle coding, the presence or absence of each of these principles of influence was noted, as was the decision makers' availability of alternatives (including reference to the representations used) in making the decision.

Description of the Case

The past decade in Alberta has been a period of relatively stable political leadership, though a mid-decade change in leadership ushered in a new style of government. Alongside these bureaucratic changes are the economic circumstances of this province, which are perhaps more relevant to the case since its governmental revenues are more closely tied to volatility in the global energy sector than any other area of the country. Noted for its marked cycles of boom and bust, Alberta's governmental spending can swing from measures of austerity to extravagance in a matter of months. While economic conditions are notable, provincial funding allocations for public libraries in Alberta have largely depended on the skillful negotiations of a small number of actors who have built up a flattering reputation of Alberta's public library services over a number of years.

In the half-decade preceding the year 2000, the government department responsible for representing public libraries, the Public Library Services Branch, enjoyed a period of stability with its elected minister. At the same time as this minister's appointment in the mid-1990s, a newly appointed director of Public Library Services was coming on board in the branch. Both of these actors had extensive experience in their respective governmental areas; the elected official had been in office for a decade, and the director had worked as a senior bureaucrat with this government for more than two decades. However, neither had a background in the library sector other than their personal experience as library users, so there was a need for both to learn about the main issues facing the public library sector at the time. The two made a very rapid assessment of the main issues in the sector and decided to put forward a plan for a request to increase funding.

The request was for $1.93 million and specifically addressed the issue of Internet connectivity. It was presented by the minister, unanimously accepted by the standing committee responsible for this decision, and later endorsed by the cabinet toward the end of 1996. Shortly afterwards, the minister was able to reallocate a further $4.8 million to public libraries for connectivity expenses. The province had recently created the agency called The Alberta Library to manage and implement these kinds of special projects. Combined with grants available from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as those from a Canadian federal government program for irregular funding for the same purpose, it secured more than $12 million on behalf of Alberta's public libraries in a period of approximately three years.

Up to the mid-2000s, little activity took place in terms of formal funding requests; these years marked the end of the deficit and debt reduction program so vigorously pursued throughout the 1990s and early part of this century. However, during this time, the minister previously responsible for libraries in the mid-1990s become the head of the Treasury Board and deputy premier. Very late in the 2006–7 fiscal year, a $20 million overall government surplus was revealed and offered to the Public Libraries Services Branch.

Also at that time, provincial responsibility for public libraries was shifted from the Ministry of Community Development to Municipal Affairs. While the move meant that the Public Library Services Branch was now part of a large ministry from a fiscal perspective, the number of programs in the new ministry is low. Over 90 percent of the multi-billion-dollar budget in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is allocated through grants-to-municipalities programs, covering areas like policing and infrastructure. With this move to a new ministry came a new minister responsible for public libraries. Known for his down-to-earth approach with his constituents, he also had little background knowledge of libraries; however, his personal connections with public library services were numerous and profound, including reminiscences of sympathetic school and public library staff assisting with his learning of English as a second language as a child. Likely influenced by his experiences as a library user from a young age and

the advice given to him from mentor politicians, this minister was also keen to create an opportunity to forward the public libraries' cause. His method included creating a committee of legislators (Members of the Legislative Assembly [MLAs]) to investigate the current state of libraries through public and stakeholder consultations as well as the arrangement of on-site library tours for the committee members and other MLA colleagues.

The report from this MLA committee was quickly prepared during 2008. Even before it was finalized, senior financial bureaucrats at the time sensed the political favor it would garner during budget deliberations and flagged it as likely resulting in a request for additional funding. Internal finance groups began to talk about a price tag of $27 million during the early 2009–10 budget deliberations in the autumn of 2008. Support for the report recommendations and its accompanying funding request was high at all levels of these finance committees.

With dramatic news of the stock market crash in mid-October 2008, all provincial budget requests were altered. The request for public libraries was revised to $9.3 million and unanimously accepted the following spring with the tabling of the 2009–10 budget.

Findings

Realizing a notable increase in provincial funding during this period was due to several factors, including multiple efforts on different fronts over many years. The personal commitment of those involved in moving forward the cause of public libraries in this province, coupled with the ability to recognize and act on opportunities as well as build on successes over many years, allowed the sector to enjoy frequent funding increases. These increases were not only substantial but higher than any other provincial increases in Canada in the past decade.

An analysis of the interview data against the Cialdini framework reveals that the tactics of consistency and commitment and authority were frequently cited in the case. A more thorough analysis indicates that the processes that were successful were also highly dependent on the tactic of liking, particularly as demonstrated through relationship building. Strong and established relationships were developed among library stakeholder groups, senior bureaucrats, and elected politicians. While the tactics of reciprocity and social proof were noted in this case, their lack of dominance was clear. The final tactic of scarcity was not noted in this case in a significant way. Indeed, the larger study from which this case was drawn shows that no study participants felt that this was a factor of influence in the decision-making process for public library budgets. Each tactic is presented below (alphabetically) in the context of how it appeared in the case, and examples of how each tactic was present are noted.

Authority

For senior financial officers, the presence of a much talked about report authored by a group of elected officials was enough to signal its probable acceptance:

So at some point earlier on in that process, we would have flagged that the committee report was being worked on, and that we anticipate government will accept it, and that there will be a price tag associated with it and that we don't have the ability to find that funding within our budget. So we are flagging a cost pressure associated with implementing a report that hasn't been reviewed or accepted by government yet. . . . The likelihood of getting it funded depends a lot on the fiscal situation of government—that's probably the biggest factor—as well as the political will behind it, these are two big things impacting it.

A request presented to the cabinet from the MLA level rather than the staff level seemed to indicate a greater likelihood of acceptance at the cabinet table. Prior to this formal request, the presence of a high-profile elected member in the Treasury Board familiar with the libraries file allowed for last-minute funding allocations in lieu of formal requests.

Consistency and Commitment

Personal and party values were of prime importance, reflecting the significance of the tactic of consistency and commitment. Specific information about decision makers' backgrounds and personal commitment to public libraries was noted. One minister's own background favoring the development of public libraries in Alberta should not be downplayed. A study participant described the situation in the following way: "She was very interested in libraries; she had come from a rural background and had been involved in literacy at the local level. Growing up as a kid, there were things in Southern Alberta called 'restrooms'—these were library reading rooms in her area. . . . So she knew and understood the importance of libraries and she knew and understood how important they were to her constituents." Earlier in the case description, an anecdote about the latest elected official's experience with learning English in the library further reflects this tactic. Both of these decision makers had been profoundly affected by their own experiences in public libraries.

Advancing a message that resonates with the reigning political party values has always been important, and this message has been reinforced with library stakeholders. A senior bureaucrat noted: "As I learned more about libraries and as they were coming along, I'd try to get them to link up what they're doing to government priorities—what are you doing to support literacy? What are you doing to support leisure? We had charts set up so they understood there were all these government departments and these were the key phrases in these departments. . . . Here's what you say. Go and talk about these things. They gradually got into that."

Liking

The appearance of the codes forming the subcategory of relationship building was notable, and seeking opportunities both in circumstances and through people was an oft-mentioned theme.

Long-term senior bureaucrats knew that their information gathering extended significantly to the informal and formal networks of colleagues developed through the various positions that they held over the course of their careers. One participant reflected: "That was all based on building personal relationships with people. . . . When I first came to [this province] I went and talked to all the support people, all the budget people. I had a relationship with those people for 20+ years, they had my back. When I shifted into Libraries, it was no problem. They would see opportunities before I would in terms of the money and give me a heads up. . . . I made sure that I knew the EA [executive assistant], got to be best buddies with the EAs wherever they were."

The ability to work with colleagues was not only necessary for gaining acceptance of program proposals; it was an essential part of the professional behavior in the bureaucratic structure. In some instances in the study, it was clearly stated that library stakeholders were not well connected and indeed misunderstood the effectiveness of this element in successful governmental work: "The key is not to give up on developing personal relationships." It should be noted that library stakeholders also continued to maintain their relationships with key elected officials over the long term, and, indeed, they were financially rewarded on several occasions. Further connections for additional funding for public and academic libraries in Alberta were made through a long-standing friendship between the former president of the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the former lieutenant governor of the province.

Reciprocity

The reciprocity tactic encompassed several codes; the chance for politicians to see and speak about the positive benefits of a program was most often mentioned as motivation around this tactic. In other words, successful programs allowed politicians to share stories about the positive outcomes of the work of their party. As one interview participant noted: "The thing was understanding the environment, making sure no one got burnt, and meeting their needs. We made them look good. . . . And our deputy, we had to keep our deputies in the loop and give them credit for this stuff. They were the ones who came up with this idea—what a brilliant guy." Overlooking opportunities to provide benefit back to those funding governments can prove detrimental, both in the sense that these missteps were noted and in the erosion of long-term relationship building and potential for positive images of the library sector.

Scarcity

An explanatory comment on the concept of scarcity must be made. While this tactic describes the high value of items, services, organizations, and the like that are not readily available, the concept was only noted in the study in the negative or as a null tactic. Because of this, the

notion that libraries are not highly valued was used as the basis to examine this tactic. An example of this can be seen in the following example: "We see that so often, libraries that haven't asked for an increase in ten years, they become invisible to the community government. But then if you're seen only as a yapping dog and haven't told your story and built the relationship so the decision makers are somehow attached to your library, you could be telling your story but it could be falling on deaf ears."

When annual meetings with the minister were coordinated, library stakeholders were consistently reminded to speak about issues relevant to provincial concern. An experienced bureaucrat recalled, "[We'd meet stakeholders prior to the meeting to say,] 'We need to put forward provincial issues or issues directly related to the MLA report because that's what guides our strategic work at the moment.' For the most part it's fine, but you always of course have your very gung-ho trustee of a regional library system saying [something off-topic]."

Social Proof

The tactic of social proof was most noted as a tool for those in the bureaucracy to assemble background information for their business cases. Environmental scans are increasingly being carried out at the senior bureaucratic level to help build their own confidence in forwarding business cases to the ministerial level. However, in no instances were specific detailed statistics used to build a case.

Summary

The importance of ensuring that elected officials understood the congruency between their party's campaign goals and the work of the library was stressed repeatedly in this case. Public libraries' fortunes were augmented when more than one sympathetic minister was given responsibility for public libraries; in two cases, their personal experiences were central to their understanding of the role of the public library and how it could forward their governmental agenda. Without question, the strong economic footing, despite the economic downturn, allowed requests for increased funding to be considered and granted; however, additional funds would not have been forthcoming without a network of key actors in place to support the request, regardless of the financial circumstances.

Of lesser importance, yet still present, were the tactics of reciprocity and social proof. At a practical level, activities undertaken related to these tactics were important insofar as they provided support to the more dominant tactics. For example, other jurisdictions were considered in the process of developing background information for senior bureaucrats yet rarely referenced at the political level. While the concept of scarcity was intentionally covered in the interviews and clearly understood by the participants, none felt that this was a factor of influence in their decision making about public library budgets.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced decision-making priorities during the budget process in Alberta in the 2009–10 fiscal year. In addition, it considered whether the tactics of social influence as described in Cialdini's framework affected these funding decisions.

The decisions were grounded in both political and economic contexts. The political context refers to the ability of those actors involved in decision making to recognize opportunities suitable for promoting their cause in terms of financial affordability, the election cycle, the availability of key actors willing to advance the issue, and the balance of power among reigning political parties. The impact of key individuals responsible for decisions, namely elected politicians, intersects with the political context. It is of utmost importance to secure the attention of the elected official responsible for the portfolio related to the issue of concern. This may be accomplished in several ways, and this study reveals three of them: through a direct or peripheral relationship with the decision maker or those in his or her professional and personal networks, through the directing of their attention to a specific matter by a superior, or through their own desire to "champion the cause." For favorable responses to be granted to these individuals, informal support for the cause must be sought through networks of bureaucratic and elected individuals; these networks are most effectively exploited when developed over time. In this instance, the role of individual political actors sympathetic to the cause of public libraries was key, resulting in a successful outcome.

The originality of this study lies at the junction of three elements: tactics of social influence in decision making, Canadian provincial politics, and public library funding. No previous studies have considered these elements jointly. Few research studies have examined the potential causes for increased funding. Previous studies have considered the impact patrons, library boards, library directors, and even library services can have on funding, generally concluding that these actors, as a group, have little impact on the process. This study focused on the targets of funding requests in order to ask the question about effective techniques at the individual level. In directing data collection efforts at the targets rather than the agents in the funding request process, this study began to consider the question of empirical measurement of the effectiveness of funding request techniques made by library stakeholders.

Appendix
Semistructured Interview Schedule

Consistency and Commitment:

- What impact do letters from concerned stakeholder groups have?
- Have you had any challenges regarding libraries in recent years?
- What about the impact of questions from the opposition?

- How do you balance competing demands for dollars within the department?
- How do past interactions and perceptions impact your future decisions?
- How do you balance community pressures, partisan priorities, and requests from the public?
- How do government-wide initiatives play out when you're considering funding requests?

Liking:

- Are reasons for requests for funding for libraries clear to you? From whom do you normally receive this kind of request?
- Do you receive mixed messages about libraries, either generally or in terms of budget information?
- Did you have prior relationships (e.g., friendships, working relationships, familial connections, etc.) with anyone directly working in the library community prior to being appointed minister?
- What kind of image do visits to special library events create for you? Do they help inform you of the issues faced by libraries?
- Tell me about your own library experiences. Were you a library user as a child?
- Do any interactions with library board members particularly stand out in your mind?

Reciprocity:

- Do you work with any of your cabinet colleagues to increase support for an increase in a service area?
- Do visits to special events, such as grand openings, association receptions, etc., increase your understanding of services in your portfolio? Is it important that you be recognized? In what ways?
- Describe what happens when a cabinet colleague approaches you about a topic.
- Describe the role your team in the Ministry plays, for example, the deputy, senior managers, etc. Would you look to other cabinet colleagues, and look to share information sort of horizontally, rather than vertically?

Scarcity:

- Have you been aware of any campaigns promoting public libraries?
- Describe the impact visits from board members have during the funding request period.
- What impact does the letter-writing public have?

Authority:

- What role does information in the media play in your decision-making process?

- When making decisions about other programs within your portfolio, how does the process for libraries compare?
- Describe the role of the bureaucracy in your decision-making process.
- When there is change within the department, how does that impact the process (e.g., a new deputy)?
- Tell me about meetings with board members. How do you gather information from interest groups?
- Whom would you consider to be an authority on library information?
- Do you consult with librarians?
- Are there other people that you would turn to if you're looking for information about libraries?

Social Proof:

- Do you consider what's going on in [the next province over], or in similar countries like Australia, or, conversely, what's going on at the municipal level? Is that a factor?
- What role do other levels of government play in your decision-making process?
- Particularly in the States right now, the municipal governments are saying they're relying a lot more on performance measurement to make financial decisions. Is that a factor at all?
- What about the role of research reports?

General Solicitations:

- Was there any one or were there any two/three key people on whom you relied for information to help inform your decisions?
- What would influence you to make a decision regarding budget increases in one area of your portfolio over another in upcoming years?
- Would you say there's much variation in the budget process from year to year?

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