



# A Collaborative Approach to Advocacy

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**R**uth Thorkelson, Retail Council of Canada (RCC) Senior Vice President, Public Affairs, led an advocacy presentation (alongside RCC's Vice-President, Federal Relations, Terrance Oakey) at the outset of CBA's Member Forum during the recent National Conference. She also participated in the subsequent discussion. Following are her observations about the Association's top priorities with respect to government relations and her thoughts on how to forward CBA's objectives in this area.

One of the chief benefits of CBA's partnership with Retail Council of Canada (RCC) is a new, collaborative approach to advocacy and government relations on CBA issues. This will provide CBA with the opportunity to leverage RCC's strengths in advocacy expertise and relationships in key government capitals.

This new relationship will also provide the impetus for the Association to reach out to their membership and review their key public policy issues. Factors such as very challenging economic times, consolidation within the industry and rapidly changing technological advances have radically altered the policy landscape for the cultural industries embodied and supported by CBA.

## Advocacy analysis:

Having had the opportunity to listen to CBA members review their advocacy priorities, RCC suggests it would be helpful to focus on one key principle in formulating the advocacy strategy for CBA: fairness across formats. The greatest challenge CBA faces is that technological advances have rendered many previously essential policy goals obsolete, and virtually unenforceable. CBA risks becoming irrelevant in the debate, if it does not renew and sharpen its "asks" and then develop a robust program

to raise its profile and re-engage itself as an essential player in the cultural industries debate in Canada.


## Key issues for CBA include:

- Designing and implementing an awareness-raising program for government officials, authors, publishers and the public on the cultural values embodied in a secure and vibrant independent book-selling sector
- Encouraging and strengthening relationships among key elements of the cultural sector and establishing mutually beneficial common ground on policy issues
- Establishing an industry-wide position on key public policy issues such as parallel imports and the fairer application of the book rate and its expansion to booksellers
- Considering expanding its advocacy to include calling for direct funding programs that will maintain and strengthen cultural industries, including the Canadian-owned bookselling sector

## Developing a plan of action:

CBA must first work internally to create or re-activate member committees, including publisher and author relations committees, and public advocacy and/or relations committees. These committees will initially be charged with developing an outreach program to authors and publishers establishing common ground in sup-

port of Canadian booksellers (defining a common message that all stakeholders can endorse and promote). The Association must then initiate a process to solicit member input on advocacy goals and, guided by that feedback, create a priority list for action. RCC will then assist CBA in developing basic communications materials to share with stakeholders and government officials on key policy issues. RCC is committed to helping CBA develop advocacy programs for public policy goals and raising awareness among government officials about our issues—keeping CBA objectives top of mind through regular written and face-to-face contact with government representatives.

*As RCC's Senior Vice President, Public Affairs, Ruth Thorkelson leads the Council's public affairs strategy in its mission to be the Voice of Retail on Canadian retail industry issues. She came to the Retail Council from a successful consulting practice in Ottawa and Toronto. Providing advice and strategy on public policy development, strategic communications and public affairs, her clients included companies in the telecommunications and natural resources sectors, and non-government organizations. Thorkelson served as Deputy Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister from 2003 to 2005. Prior to joining the PMO, she was Vice-President, Government Relations and Communications for a major Canadian industry association. *