

# **More Canada**

## *Increasing Canadians' Awareness and Reading of Canadian Books*

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### **Cutting postal rates for books would give Canadian authors and readers a big boost: industry report**

Giving bookstores and publishers extra-low rates at Canada Post could achieve a big boost in sales of Canadian-authored books, says a new industry report. It would lead more discovery and reading of these books by Canadians.

The More Canada volunteer think tank suggests that Ottawa offer low postal rates to bookstores stocking a wide selection of Canadian books. The rate should also be made available to Canadian-owned publishers for shipments to bookstores and other customers.

Canada already has an extra-low rate for book parcels at Canada Post. Right now the rate is restricted to public libraries. The report recommends it be extended to qualifying bookstores and publishers.

Low postal rates would allow bookstores to compete more effectively for online book sales with Amazon, which already enjoys extra-low shipping rates due to its huge volumes. Local independent bookstores and Chapters/Indigo could afford to offer free shipping on all orders, if they could use Canada Post's library book rate.

Online book sales have grown dramatically during Covid. Many independent bookstores now have active websites, offering delivery and shipping to customers. Chapters/Indigo credits online sales for better-than-expected sales in the past six months. But Indigo CEO Heather Riesman says high shipping costs means online sales lose money for the company.

Industry experts expect that the shift to online purchasing won't end any time soon. A move to offer bookstores low shipping rates would help them successfully compete with Amazon.

Many countries offer low postal rates on books, to support literacy and encourage reading. The US Postal Service's rates are similar to Canada Post's library book rate. What Canada should do, says the think tank report, is tie a low book postal rate to cultural policy goals – specifically, encouraging discovery and reading of Canadian-authored books.

The More Canada think tank recommendation is that bookstores should qualify for the low rates if Canadian-authored books make up at least 20% of their stock. Canadian books already account for about 20% of the sales of independent bookstores in English Canada, though somewhat less of store inventory. Canadian-owned online bookstores would be eligible when Canadian books made up 20% or more of sales.

A wider range of Canadian books on bookstore shelves and websites would allow book buyers to discover appealing and interesting Canadian authors they do not see today. The result would increase sales and reading of those books.

The report points out that a long-established policy in Quebec gets a high percentage of Canadian books on shelves. The result in a far more buying and reading of Canadian authors in that province.

The report shows how to put a cultural spin on industry requests for low shipping rates. The recently-launched Canadian Independent Booksellers Association and the Association of Canadian Publishers have both asked Ottawa for access to a low book rate through Canada Post.

The More Canada think tank report was prepared by group's steering committee: Philip Cercone, McGill-Queens University Press, James Lorimer, Formac Publishing and James Lorimer & Company, and Jeff Miller, Irwin Law.

The report, titled Cultural Policy and Low Postal Rates for Canadian Bookstores and Publishers, is now online at [www.morecanada.ca](http://www.morecanada.ca).

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