

Why are Public Libraries important to our Ontario Communities?

Public Libraries Transform Communities

The public library is more than a building.

The public library is more than books and people.

The public library is:

The one community gathering place, both physical and virtual, which provides equal access for all to information, knowledge, culture, and learning resources in print and electronic format, along with advice, assistance and connections, to transform individuals, communities and the economy, in the 21st century of a digital, globalized world.

Range of Services (free of charge):

Information skills development

- assisting users find relevant, accurate information quickly, through both print and electronic sources

Reference centre

- maintaining up-to-date and accurate information on a wide range of subjects of interest to users in print and electronic formats

Virtual/digital information

- using communications technology so users can connect virtually to the library, each other, their community, and a world of databases and cultural resources

Career development and employment

- maintaining up-to-date reference materials on market trends and career opportunities

Popular materials

- materials in a variety of formats (eg. books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, Offering current high-demand etc.)

Support for small business and entrepreneurs

- providing information to support local business, economic and workforce development

Newcomers' adaptation to Canadian society

- offering settlement support, accreditation and employment support, and ESL programs

Government and community services

- facilitating access to information on services and programs of government and community agencies

Pre-schoolers' door to learning

- providing materials and programs for young children, which encourage an interest in literacy and learning

Support for formal education

- providing materials and programs that complement formal studies

Cultural heritage

- maintaining and providing access to local historical collections

Re-acquaint yourself with your public library.

Public libraries contribute to a community's overall liveability by being at the core of community engagement and lifelong learning, enhancing cultural and social activities, and generating economic improvement.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES ENABLE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO ACHIEVE:

- informed and involved citizens
- strong and fiscally sustainable communities
- improved economic and business development
- highly skilled labour forces
- culturally diverse and inclusive communities
- safe, people-friendly places to settle, with high quality of life
- increased communication and cooperation among community groups
- enhanced cultural resources and awareness
- strong civic pride and local identity

HOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE STRUCTURED

- Public libraries are independent legal corporations that have governing boards with the authority to set policy and manage library affairs under the Public Libraries Act, RSO 1990, c. P.44.
- Public libraries are established under subsection 3(1) of the Act by the passing of a by-law by a municipal council. The number of council members on a public library board is limited to one less than a majority of the board.
- Under subsections 23(1) and (2) of the Act, public libraries are required to provide their services free of charge.
- While public libraries are independent entities from a legal perspective and are not departments of municipalities, they serve the same public and address issues common to both bodies.
- Because municipalities fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual spending, many library boards have adopted their municipalities' financial policies and procedures in an effort to align agendas and streamline business processes.

Local Governments fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual operating budgets. If you need a reminder of how well this money is being used and how much the community benefits from library services, please visit your local library or contact your board chair for a tour. Take some time to get to know us again. We guarantee you'll become a library champion!

FAST FACTS

On average, Ontario's municipalities provide 85% of the operating funds to their public libraries.

Ontario libraries have experienced a 73% decline in provincial funding over the last 10 years.

Utilization of public libraries has increased dramatically (up to 20%) in these tough economic times, as citizens seek free access to computers, the Internet, on-line databases, books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and specialized training programs.

Under Ontario's Public Libraries Act, all public libraries must provide free admission and free use of materials, onsite. Residents of library service areas must also be permitted to borrow library materials and use reference and information services free of charge.

Public libraries are committed to intellectual freedom and freedom of expression, including activity which some may consider unconventional. Library collections reflect the diverse interests of the community and facilities are made available to all individuals who need them.

Key Issues for Ontario's Public Libraries

1. Need for Growing, Sustainable Operating Funds from Municipalities

- Public libraries build/transform individuals, communities and local economies in the globalized world, through such services as literacy programs, support for small businesses, resources for career development and employment, and settlement support for newcomers.
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- On average, Ontario's municipalities provide 85% of the operating funds to their public libraries.
- Public libraries provide a significant return on investment. Their services are indispensable. Without them communities are at a significant disadvantage in recovering from the current economic recession and growing a knowledge economy.

2. Inadequacy of Funding from the Provincial Government.

- Ontario libraries have experienced a 73% decline in provincial funding over the last 10 years.
- Ontario's share of library funding is the lowest (4% of total revenue) of all provinces with municipally funded library systems and is 100% less than the closest comparator.
- Because a renewed library system plays a key role in furthering the goals and priorities of the provincial government, the provincial government should become a stronger partner with municipalities (who shoulder disproportionate funding responsibility) in providing sustainable operating grants to Ontario's vital public libraries. We need municipalities to help champion this message.

3. Difficulty in Accessing Infrastructure Funds.

- Public libraries have a considerable need for sustainable capital/infrastructure funding, especially for electronic information systems. However, the funding available to public libraries through municipalities does not generally address the requirement for periodic or ongoing facility updating, accessibility, etc.
- Large amounts of infrastructure funding have been announced through the Building Canada Fund – Communities Component and the Infrastructure Stimulus Fund. However, these funds still require municipalities to share 1/3 of the costs. Most municipalities have had to give higher priority to projects involving sewers, roads and culverts than to library refurbishment.
- Public libraries are vital public places that provide information and resources to strengthen individuals, communities and local economies in the globalized world.

4. Need for Expanded Programming Targeted to Newcomers.

- Many municipalities are challenged to attract and support newcomers as a key to economic development.
- Public libraries contribute to the successful adaptation of newcomers to their community and to Canadian society by offering settlement support, accreditation and employment support, ESL programs and information on community and government services.
- Public libraries serving large populations of newcomers have no designated funding source for multi-lingual collections or specialized programs.