

## Public Libraries Support Provincial Priorities

The Ontario Ministry of Culture has the lead responsibility for public libraries. However, Ontario public libraries support agendas of other ministries benefiting the following overall provincial priorities:

### **Economic Development**

- Supporting small business and entrepreneurs, who will drive local economic recovery and job creation, with resources such as electronic databases on market trends and information on regulatory obligations.

### **Early Literacy Development**

- Facilitating the Best Start Strategy by drawing on the expertise and infrastructure that already exists in public libraries through their vast array of pre-school and children's literacy programs.

### **Integration of New Canadians**

- Helping newcomers to Canada succeed through settlement support, language acquisition including ESL programs, accreditation and employment support and maintaining cultural connections.

### **Employment**

- Providing services and resources for career planning, job search and upgrading skills.

### **Efficient Government Services**

- Serving as the first point of contact for information and referral on community and government programs, making libraries logical partners in rationalizing services with Service Ontario, Public Health Departments, Employment Resource Centres, Small Business Enterprise Centres and 211 organizations.

### **Cultural Vitality**

- Feeding Ontario's cultural framework, which is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability.

**Public Libraries are Mitigating the Impact of the Recession on the People Adversely Affected.**

- In the past year, overall public library use has increased by as much as 20%, but as high as 70% in such areas as enrolment in employment programs, DVD lending and library website visits.
- Ontarians are making the most of their library's *free* services and its wealth of resources on job opportunities, career planning and training, small business management, and on services like literacy programs, computer skills development and supports for newcomers and students.
- Cash-strapped families are accessing the public library's extensive collection of books, databases, DVD's, magazines and newspapers.
- Long waiting lists for in-house computers at public libraries are the norm because a significant number of Ontarians do not have access to computers or the Internet at home.

# Provincial Support to Public Libraries

## **a) The Public Libraries Act**

The government's commitment through the Public Libraries Act to free and universal access to information is a fundamental requirement for an informed and democratic society.

Another important element of the Act is the provision made for Library Boards. Library Boards allow for greater participation by communities in the planning and provision of library services and programs. Citizen members provide a balance between the political processes and community needs and priorities. Councilors on the other hand offer valuable insights into the local government, its strategic and political directions, the decision making process and budget priorities. As well, they are able to make useful links to other local initiatives and programs.

## **b) Financial Support**

The provincial interest in public libraries should be supported with appropriate levels of financial support. The provincial government's contribution to the operating budgets of public libraries:

- Has remained static for the past 13 years with no accommodation for inflation, for the huge increases in utilization, or for the new generation of users with fundamentally different information seeking habits.
- Represents only 5% of the total (on average) and is now among the lowest of all provinces on a per capita basis.

While one-time, year-end grants have helped, such as those given to Southern Ontario Library Services and Knowledge Ontario in 2008, all public libraries need an increase in ongoing provincial operating grants to effectively plan for and meet current and future service demands.

## **c) Patchwork of Service Levels**

Municipalities are not obligated to deliver minimum levels of library services. Nevertheless, on average, Ontario's municipalities fund 85% of the operating budgets of their public libraries. The reliance on municipalities for funding and their varying levels of support have resulted in a patchwork of library service levels throughout the province, especially in the area of technological currency. Ontario's Public Libraries Act is supposed to ensure service equity and access to all, free of charge, regardless of the municipality where citizens reside. But the relatively low level of funding received from the provincial government works against this goal.

## **d) Difficulty in Accessing Infrastructure Funds**

While large amounts of infrastructure funding have been announced recently through the Building Canada Fund and Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, all but one intake has required municipalities to share 1/3 of the costs. Most municipalities have had to give higher priority to projects involving sewers, roads and water treatment than to library refurbishment.

***Safeguarding public library services and funding in Ontario is crucial.***

## **Internet Filtering is Ultimately a Parental Responsibility**

The Federation believes that public libraries have a basic responsibility to uphold Canada's Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to facilitate access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, including those which some elements of society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable.

The Internet has many wonderful resources for children, but it is unregulated. Since there is no foolproof way to eliminate inappropriate material, public libraries are taking special measures to instruct and protect children in their use of the Internet. Most public library boards have approved policies and procedures on Internet access for children.

Filters do not guarantee that all inappropriate material will be blocked. Filters can also block useful material. With the features available today on wireless devices such as cell phones and with the variety of other public places without filters, controlling a child's access to the Internet has become a complex societal issue. We believe the best and most reliable filter is a child's parent or guardian.

The Federation is taking the opportunity today to meet with MPPs to share with them the good news story about public libraries and how they contribute to achieving provincial objectives.

## **Want to Learn More?**

- Visit a public library. See for yourself how we help thousands of people in need who wouldn't be able to get information, entertainment, or training any other way.
- Take a librarian to coffee and see how an information specialist can help you in your work and goals. They know how to locate the hard-to-find information that no amount of Googling will.
- Talk to your colleagues about the central role that public libraries play in the life of Ontario communities. Tell them how public libraries are top-of-mind when it comes to how voters want their taxes spent.
- Schedule an hour with us so we can tell you more about how public libraries can help you reach the goals of your portfolio and riding. Don't worry. We'll call you.

**Public Libraries are fundamental to the government's goals of cultivating a knowledge economy and of closing the persistent digital divide amongst Ontario's residents.**

*The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries* is a not-for-profit membership association established in 2005 to provide a single, strong voice for public and First Nations libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs. Our services focus on four strategic pillars: advocacy, marketing, research and consortia purchasing. The Federation's membership has a good cross section of libraries of all sizes and from all geographic regions. Our 185 member libraries are responsible for serving 81% of Ontario's population. Our Board of Directors is composed of an equal number of library board trustees and library chief executives.

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