

## The Importance of Public Libraries In Ontario Communities



The Federation wishes to share with MPPs the good news story about public libraries and how they contribute to building a strong province.



Today's public libraries are treasure troves of valuable digital information and are equipped with technology that citizens can use to empower themselves and attain personal goals.

### Public Libraries are Key to a Strong Province

**Economic Development:** supporting small business and entrepreneurs who will drive local economic recovery and job creation by providing them with resources such as e-databases on market trends and information on regulatory obligations;

**Employment:** providing services and resources for career planning, job search and upgrading skills;

**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;

**Early Literacy Development:** facilitating success in the school system 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;

**Efficient Government Services:** serving as the first point of contact for information and referral on community and government programs;

**Cultural Vitality:** feeding the community's cultural framework, which is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability; and

**Affordable Leisure Activities:** offering FREE borrowing of books, music and movies or library programs for children, families and people of all ages.

## Public Libraries Provide Opportunities to Reach Constituents and Minimize Costs in the Delivery of Other Provincial Services



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.

- Libraries are community hubs and are already a trusted component of the public's travel and usage patterns. **No other cultural institution sees as wide a range of residents** (demographically) as the public library.
- **Librarians are expert search partners** and provide users with free access to data that is often costly and sometimes not available. The ability to search is not the same as knowing how to search and more importantly find.
- Because of their **customer service trained staff, extended operating hours, and close relationship with residents**, public libraries are the natural partner for provincial governments which need unconstrained, non-intimidating access to the public to deliver their programmes in communities.
- The physical plants of public libraries are available now and can be **co-locations for other provincial services**.
- Public libraries offer First Nation populations, new Canadians, seniors and economically disadvantaged communities **free access to Internet resources**.
- Public libraries are sought-after amenities that are needed to attract investors to communities. They offer a **safe environment** for children and adults.

### Range of Services (free of charge)

#### Targeted Services

##### **Support for small business and entrepreneurs**

Providing information to support local business, economic and workforce development

##### **Career development and employment**

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

##### **Early literacy development**

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

##### **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

#### **Support for formal education**

Providing materials and programs that complement formal studies

#### **Cultural heritage**

Maintaining and providing access to local historical collections

#### General Services

##### **Popular materials**

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

##### **Information Skills Development**

Assisting users to 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 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



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

# As an MPP, here's how you could help make Public Libraries Better:

## Fix the Provincial Operating Grant Situation

- 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 when it was cut by 40%, with no accommodation since for even inflation or population growth.
  - Represents only 5% of the total (on average) and is now among the lowest of all provinces on a per capita basis.
- Huge disparity exists in the province's current allocation of operating grants to individual libraries, ranging from \$0.59 to \$26.17 per citizen served.
- Recent grants funnelled through Ontario Library Services were one-time and targeted, and did not necessarily address priorities of local library boards.
- The over reliance on municipal funding has resulted in a patchwork of service levels across the province and compromises the intent of Ontario's Public Libraries Act, which is to ensure service equity and access to all, regardless of the municipality where citizens reside.

## Provide a Provincial Infrastructure Fund Dedicated Exclusively to Public Libraries

- Public libraries have considerable need for sustainable capital/infrastructure funding, especially for information technology, in order to keep pace with the new generation of users with fundamentally different information seeking habits.
- The funding available through municipalities is insufficient to address the requirement for ongoing facility updating, accommodating the AODA, etc.
- In many communities, the public library is the only place where broadband Internet access is available.
- Only 35 public library capital projects (or 3.2% of Ontario's 1,093 service points) received provincial funding through the recent Building Canada Fund and Infrastructure Stimulus Fund.

## Consult with Our Sector before Provincial Literacy Policies and Programs are Formulated

- Public libraries already play an active role in literacy programming, especially for children between the ages of zero to six years.
  - 78% provided 688 core literacy programs in 2008, involving 1.2 million hours of instruction, mostly from library staff with specialized training
  - 65% are part of community literacy partnerships involving in-kind donations such as staff time and library space, available after school hours.
- Public libraries were overlooked in provincial strategies such as Ontario Works, Early Years Centres, Parenting & Family Literacy Centres and Best Start Child & Family Centres.
- Eligibility criteria for provincially-funded literacy programs should be broadened to include public libraries, thereby avoiding the need for government to create parallel structures.



*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 available to all individuals who need them.*

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

**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 for a tour. Take some time to get to know us again. We guarantee you'll become a library champion!**

## Legislative and Funding Framework

### 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. Councillors 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.

### Financial Support

- The provincial government's contribution to the operating budgets of public libraries represents only 5% of the total (on average).
- 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.
- Service levels vary greatly from one municipality to another due to the variation in municipal support



*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.*

*Increasing provincial funding to public libraries is crucial, even in this period of financial restraint.*

**The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries** is a not-for-profit membership association established in 2005 to provide a single, strong voice for public libraries in Ontario to enhance library policies and programs. Its services focus on four strategic pillars: advocacy, marketing, research and consortia purchasing. The Federation's membership has a good cross section of all libraries of all sizes and from all geographic regions. Its over 200 member libraries are responsible for serving 78% of Ontario's population. Its Board of Directors is composed of an equal number of library board trustees and library chief executives.