



Frequently Asked Questions from the Media

1. Are public libraries still relevant with the growing use of the Internet and search engines like Google?

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. Librarians know how.

A significant segment of the population (including lower income, First Nations, new Canadians, and older Canadians) cannot afford or do not have access to computers or the Internet from their home or office. In many remote communities, the public library is the only place offering high-speed Internet connection.

2. How do public libraries benefit our municipality?

Public libraries are sought-after amenities that are needed to attract investors to communities.

They offer a safe (physically and emotionally) place for children and adults.

Libraries are key to the integration of new Canadians into the community.

3. How do libraries support our municipality's primary priority of economic recovery/development?

Public libraries are key to cultivating a knowledge economy and of closing the persistent digital divide among residents in the community.

Public libraries are able to provide more extensive resources about jobs and the economy to job seekers than the typical employment centre.

Public libraries are able to provide more data about businesses and the economy to entrepreneurs than the typical small business centre.

4. What unique benefits do public libraries offer our community that other service providers do not?

No other cultural institution sees as wide a range of residents (demographically) as the public libraries. Libraries are already part of the public's travel and usage patterns.

Because of their customer service trained staff, long operating hours, and close relationship with residents, public libraries are the natural partner for municipalities that need unconstrained, non-intimidating access to the public to deliver their programs in communities.

The physical plants of public libraries are available now and can be co-locations for municipal services.

5. How can municipalities justify supporting a soft service when they are so cash strapped and have more essential services to fund like road maintenance, garbage collection and water treatment?

In these tough economic times, public libraries are indispensable. By providing users with free access to government services, job seeking resources, and business expansion information, public libraries should be viewed as investments for municipalities to generate revenues and reduce costs in the future.

Municipalities that do not fund public libraries adequately risk missing the opportunity to build/transform individuals, communities and local economies in the electronic, global world of the 21st century.

6. How has the current economic recession affected public library utilization?

In the past year, overall library utilization in Ontario 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. To reduce household expenses, citizens are seeking free access to computers, the Internet, online databases, entertainment materials and specialized training programs.

Public libraries are mitigating the impact of the recession on the people adversely affected.

7. How are public libraries funded?

On average, municipalities fund 85% of the operating revenues of Ontario public libraries. Only 5% comes from the provincial government. The remaining 10% comes from a variety of sources such as fundraising, room rentals, fines and federal government grants. These percentages vary from municipality to municipality.

8. *What are the key issues facing public libraries in Ontario?*

a) Need for Growing, Sustainable Operating Funds from Municipalities

- Public libraries provide a significant return on investment. Their services are indispensable. Without them communities are at a significant disadvantage in attracting knowledge workers, recovering from the current economic recession and growing a knowledge economy.
- Demand for public library services is continually growing and changing, due to technological developments and the current recession. Public libraries ensure access to information for all segments of the population including First Nations, new Canadians, seniors and those with lower incomes.
- Public libraries also feed the community's cultural framework, which is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic vitality.
- The reliance on municipal funding to sustain public library operations is all the more acute because the Ontario government's operating grants to public libraries have not changed since the late 1990's.

b) Difficulty in Accessing Infrastructure Funds

- Public libraries have a considerable need for sustainable capital/infrastructure funding, especially for electronic information systems in order to keep pace with the new generation of users with fundamentally different information seeking habits.
- The funding currently available to public libraries through municipalities is insufficient to address the requirement for periodic or ongoing facility updating, accessibility, etc.
- Only 35 public library capital projects (or 3.2% of Ontario's 1093 service points) received funding through the recent Building Canada Fund and Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, in which municipalities contributed one-third.

c) Need for Expanded Programming Targeted to Newcomers

- Many municipalities seek ways 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.

9. *Why not talk to the provincial government? That's who you need to convince if you want more money.*

Public libraries are mounting a concurrent campaign to increase provincial funding. However, at present public libraries are basically a municipal service

and the work of public libraries has a direct impact on the success of municipalities in reaching their goals and fulfilling their priorities.

Your public library was established by one of your former municipal Councils, not the Province. With that decision went the long term commitment to resource your library appropriately.

10. Describe the legislative framework governing public libraries.

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.

Public libraries are established under subsection 3(1) of the Act by the passing of a by-law by a municipal council. With the exception of county libraries, the number of council members on a public library board is limited to one less than a majority of the board.

Since the inception of the Act in 1882, public libraries are required to provide their services free of charge, under subsections 23(1) and (2). 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.

Fee for service is regarded as a barrier to people using the library, especially the disadvantaged segments of the population.

Because municipalities fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual spending, serve the same constituents and address common issues, many library boards have adopted their municipalities' financial policies and procedures in an effort to align agendas and streamline business processes.

However, public libraries are not departments of municipalities. The library board is the employer of all library staff, including its Chief Executive Officer.

11. What is the public library's position on Internet filtering?

Public libraries have a basic responsibility to uphold 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. Although there is no foolproof way to eliminate inappropriate material, most public library boards have approved policies and procedures on Internet access to protect children, which do not necessarily include filtering. Recent incidents at

London Public Library are evidence that procedures to monitor Internet access work.

Filters do not guarantee that all inappropriate material will be blocked. Filters can also block useful material. With the variety of other public places and wireless devices without filters, controlling a child's access to the Internet is a complex societal issue. The best and most reliable filter is a child's parent or guardian.

(Note to Public Libraries: The Federation can help you with additional support in fielding questions on this sensitive topic. Please do not hesitate to contact our office.)

12. What's the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries?

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 libraries of all sizes and from all geographic regions. Its 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.