

# The Importance of Public Libraries to our Ontario Communities



Today's public libraries are treasure troves of valuable digital information and equipped with technology that citizens can use to empower themselves and attain personal goals, often from home on a 24/7 basis. Market survey after survey ranks public libraries in the top three of all municipal services, along with fire and ambulance.

## 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

# Public Libraries Support Municipal Priorities

## The programs and services of public libraries benefit the following priorities of municipal governments:



*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.*



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

**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 Municipal Services

- 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 municipal 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 municipal 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.

# Key Issues for Your Local Public Library

## Need for Growing, Sustainable Operating Funds from Municipalities

- Public libraries provide a significant return on investment. Without them communities are at a significant disadvantage in attracting knowledge workers, recovering from the current economic recession and a growing knowledge economy.
- In the past year, overall library utilization 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. In these tough economic times, citizens are seeking free access to computers, the Internet, online databases, entertainment materials and specialized training programs.
- Increased reliance on municipal funding to sustain public library operations is because the Ontario government's operating grants to public libraries have not changed since the late 1990s.

## 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.
- 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 service points) received funding through the recent Building Canada Fund and Infrastructure Stimulus Fund, in which municipalities contributed one-third.

## Need for Expanded Programming for 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.

***Local governments fund the lion's share of public libraries' annual operational 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!***



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*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.*



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*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.*

## Legislative and Funding Framework

- 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. 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.
- On average, municipalities fund 85% of the operating revenues of Ontario public libraries. Only 5% comes from the provincial government.
- 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.
- Public libraries are not departments of municipalities. The library board is the employer of all library staff, including its Chief Executive Officer.



*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.*

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

**About the Federation:** 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 210 member libraries are responsible for serving 80% of Ontario's population. Its Board of Directors is composed of an equal number of library board trustees and library chief executives.