

Investing in the Modernization of Ontario's Public Libraries

2020 Pre-Budget Submission

The Ontario government's 2019/20 Budget maintained provincial Libraries Sector Support funding provided directly to Ontario's public libraries. While representing a modest 4% of local public library budgets, which are mostly municipally-supported, provincial funding nevertheless provides critical funding support for operations (such as the Public Library Operating Grant), shared resources, broadband connectivity and pay equity. Unlike most sectors in Ontario, provincial funding for libraries has been frozen for over 22 years. Despite no net increase in provincial or municipal funding over this period, public libraries have effectively managed their resources, evolved to meet the needs of their communities and embraced major leaps in technology.

Libraries across Ontario share best practices and use technology to make resources more accessible and responsive to people's changing needs. But in a growing number of communities, Ontario's libraries are reaching the limits of what they can do to keep up with these changes on their own, especially as it comes to meeting the growing need for access to digital resources. This is especially true for small and medium-sized municipalities, many of which are in rural and Northern Ontario, where the public library is a vital – and often the only – community hub and public resource for seniors, youth and families in the community.

Proposal to Address Gaps

By helping Ontario's public libraries modernize and investing additional funds, the government can make sure that all people – no matter where they live – continue to have access to modern, cost-effective resources and services through their local public libraries.

In addition to maintaining funding for Ontario's public libraries at current levels, this can be achieved by making a targeted investment of new funds into:

- 1. Delivering on the Ontario Government's Broadband Action Plan through an Ontario Digital Public Library**
- 2. Completing the Transformation of Inter-Library Loan**

Delivering on Ontario's Broadband Action Plan

Fair access to modern, digital resources for the people of Ontario – no matter where they live

Public libraries are increasingly focused on meeting the needs of their community for digital and online resources and services that can be accessed through the library or at home. Digital adoption by public libraries is happening at an incredible pace:

- Since 2000, Ontarians have accessed their local public library digitally 1.3 billion times.¹
- In 2018, 284,000 Ontarians enrolled in over 700,000 online courses through local public libraries across Ontario.²
- **Ontarians borrowed 494,026 e-books from local public libraries in 2018. Rural Ontario residents accessed twice as many e-books per capita through the library as people in urban communities.**³

Many public libraries and people in Ontario do not have the access they need to these increasingly core resources. E-resources and services are expensive, and when purchased on a patchwork, library-by-library basis, many local public libraries struggle to pay for or are unable to afford these high-quality resources. For example, people living in Ontario communities with populations of under 5,000 have access to **less than half the selection of e-book titles** and **a third of databases** available to residents of large urban centres like Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton.⁴ Most First Nations public libraries have little to no access to e-resources or services.

E-learning platforms – like LinkedIn Learning (Lynda.com), Gale Courses, Mango Languages, Brainfuse, or RB Digital – are invaluable for job training and re-training, lifelong learning and homework help. **Over 80%** of libraries serving populations of under 5,000 have no subscriptions to e-learning platforms at all.⁵

Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan recognized that public libraries in rural, remote and First Nations are struggling to provide access to digital resources. Furthermore, it set out how modernizing access to broadband and its capabilities is critical to delivering on several of the government's priorities, including:

- Making Ontario open for business by attracting and stimulating new economic activity & investment
- Enhancing access to government services
- Supporting expanded online learning for Ontario students
- Improving quality-of-life for all Ontarians

Creating an **Ontario Digital Public Library**, supported through ongoing, multi-year investment by the province and operated by Ontario's library services agencies, would leverage the province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a common set of e-learning and online resources through their public library. People living in small, rural, Northern and First Nations would be able to access the same wide range of digital resources through their local public library as in big city libraries.

Specifically, this investment would:

- Make the Ontario Digital Public Library available free-of-charge to **all public libraries in Ontario**.
- Utilize cloud-based technology to develop and maintain a platform for Ontario Digital Public Library resources accessible through local public libraries.
- Provide shared access to extensive e-resources to all public libraries in Ontario, including e-learning and skills development resources to support job readiness.
- Enable negotiation of consortium and discounted pricing for e-resources and services, thereby achieving

significant cost savings.

- Help facilitate the digitization and preservation of heritage materials and documents in local public libraries across Ontario, protecting and making this unique content available to all Ontarians.
- Support training for library staff to help people access the available e-resources.

Summary of Proposed Annual Investment

- Databases
 - Funding to provide a core suite of these digital resources to local public libraries in every community across Ontario.
- E-book collection enhancement
 - Targeted to build capacity and availability in communities with limited or no access to e-books.
- Local IT strategy
 - Support for local IT strategies and implementation for small and remote public libraries to ensure, expand and maintain access to these digital resources.
- Training and education for staff and communities
 - Development and maintenance of the Ontario Digital Public Library platform, as well as training and support to ensure that local public libraries are able to help local residents effectively use the extensive resource base.
- **Total annual investment - \$4.5 - \$4.7 million annually in Year 1; increasing to \$12 million annually by Year 3**

Transforming Inter-Library Loan

Protecting services for the people and communities that need it most

Inter-library loan is a provincially-funded service that enables people to borrow materials from libraries across Ontario through their local public library. Coordinated by Ontario's library services agencies, inter-library loan allows public libraries, especially in small and medium-sized communities, to leverage the combined collection of hundreds of Ontario's public libraries to meet the needs of local residents. This helps them make smart purchasing choices – avoiding waste and the impossibility of carrying all the books and materials people need – while giving people access to the same selection of materials available in major urban libraries.

Following funding reductions for Ontario's library service agencies in the 2019 Ontario Budget, the Ontario Government and SOLS and OLS-N re-established inter-library loan services in Ontario after a brief service suspension. In Southern Ontario, this meant implementing a new model – already used in Northern Ontario – that no longer relies upon a dedicated van service. Now, inter-library loans are fulfilled by having public libraries access the preferential postage rates through Canada Post to deliver library materials.

Under the new model, both SOLS and OLS-N provide some subsidized funding to Ontario public libraries to help cover postage costs incurred from using Canada Post's library materials ("book") rate, while continuing to maintain the centralized online catalogue that lets library users find and request materials held at other Ontario public libraries.

The ministry's allocated funding is well below what is needed to meet the actual demand for inter-library loan across the province. Many public libraries, primarily in smaller urban communities and rural areas, are unable to meet the inter-library loan needs their communities. The funding for the re-launched inter-library loan service was determined based on the level of funding in Northern Ontario, which is historically low when compared to the support that was provided to Southern Ontario libraries.

As a result, approximately 35% of inter-library loan requests are not being fulfilled, even though the materials are available. Many public libraries can no longer afford to meet the needs of the people in their community, especially students and seniors, for this important service.

By increasing the subsidized funding for inter-library loans, all public libraries will be able to meet the needs of people in their communities and inter-library loan services in Northern Ontario will have its historic underfunding resolved, ensuring that all Ontarians have fair access to this provincially-supported service.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Stratford** (pop. 31,500), **Belleville** (50,000) and **Quinte West** (43,500) were Ontario's top 3 public libraries for using inter-library loan in 2017; local residents in each community borrowed 10 times more materials through inter-library loan than residents in Toronto, Mississauga or Kitchener.
- In the same year, Toronto residents used inter-library loan less than Ontarians living in **Renfrew** (pop. 8,500), **Gravenhurst** (12,300) or **Trent Hills** (12,900).

Summary of Proposed Annual Investment

- Existing provincial funding for inter-library loan: \$361,000
- **Additional provincial funding required to meet anticipated demand in 2020-21: \$375,000 - \$425,000**

Public libraries are essential to people and families across Ontario

As Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource and community hubs, public libraries are helping millions of Ontarians independently train, learn and reach their potential. Reaching 98% of Ontarians in hundreds of Ontario communities of all sizes, public libraries are local, close to home, and adapt to the priorities of the people and communities they serve. Trained, frontline library staff are people focused, responding to these unique needs by developing, providing and offering:

- Job training – and re-training – programs and resources
- Small business support and community economic development
- Equitable, reliable access to broadband internet in underserved areas
- Frontline access and support for digital government services through ServiceOntario
- Affordable, high-quality children's programs for young families

Public libraries deliver a big return on investment in communities across Ontario. They've become experts at maximizing the value of every dollar, with an overwhelming focus on providing frontline support and people-focused resources. Over the past 20 years, that has included a constant commitment to evolve and invest to meet the needs of the people in their local communities.

It's no surprise that public libraries are consistently voted by people as one of Ontario's most trusted institutions.⁶

DID YOU KNOW?

Every dollar invested in public libraries generates significant direct economic benefits back to the community. Here are just a few examples:

- **Vaughan:** \$1 = \$5.57⁷
- **Milton:** \$1 = \$5.67⁸
- **Pickering:** \$1 = \$5.85⁹
- **Stratford:** \$1 = \$7.48¹⁰
- **Ottawa:** \$1=\$4.17¹¹

Ontario Library Association / Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

The **Ontario Library Association (OLA)** is the oldest continually-operating non-profit library association in Canada, with over 5,000 members comprised of library staff and supporters from public, school, academic, and special libraries.

The **Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL)** represents 246 public library systems in Ontario, including 45 First Nations public libraries, in communities throughout the Province.

Together, OLA & FOPL are committed to ensuring that libraries can to continue to play a critical role in the social, education, cultural and economic success of our communities and schools.

¹Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. (2018). [Ontario Public Library Statistics](#)

²Ibid, 2018.

³Ibid, 2018.

⁴Ibid, 2018.

⁵Ibid, 2018.

⁶Pew Research Center, 2016, 2017; Varheim, 2014.

⁷Vaughan Public Library (2017). [The Economic Impact of Vaughan Public Libraries on the City of Vaughan.](#)

⁸Milton Public Library. (2014). [The Economic Impact of the Milton Public Library on the Town of Milton.](#)

⁹Pickering Public Library. (2014). [The Economic Impact of the Pickering Public Library on the City of Pickering.](#)

¹⁰Stratford Public Library. (2015). [Under the Umbrella: Stratford Public Library's economic impact.](#)

¹¹Ottawa Public Library. (2016). [Check out the Benefit: The Economic Benefits of the Ottawa Public Library.](#)