



Executive Director's 2024 AGM Report

Report to: The FOPL Board and Members
Prepared by: Dina Stevens
Prepared on: April 19, 2024

Recommendation

THAT the FOPL board and members receive this report as information.

Report

Executive Director's Report for the 2023 Fiscal Year

It is my privilege to present the Executive Director's Report for the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) for the year 2023. As 2023 was our first full year out of the pandemic, we saw much more activity, advocacy, engagement and success than we had in my previous two years with FOPL. We were able to make real and impactful progress with this provincial government and move our provincial asks forward.

Advocacy at the beginning of 2023 kicked-off with sector consultations with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. After preliminary meetings in the fall of 2022 during the Ontario Public Library Week event in Hamilton, Minister Lumsden, new to the MTCS portfolio, was interested in getting to know library stakeholders and learning about our provincial asks. FOPL, along with several other stakeholders, were invited to provide input on modernizing support for Ontario's Public Libraries.

In addition to these lengthy consultations, January through to March saw deputations to both the Minister of Finance and the Standing Committee of Economic Affairs and Finance. For the 2023 budget season, FOPL and members from across the province gave 6 deputations in total, speaking to our provincial budget asks and highlighting the value of public libraries. Deputations culminated in a formal pre-budget submission at the end of March to the Ministry of Finance, focusing on creating an Ontario Digital Public Library (ODPL), emergent funds for the First Nations Salary Supplement, and maintaining critical provincial operating grants. Also in March, an article by the Canadian Press featured FOPL in 56 news outlets, leading to further interviews and spotlights on our activities as well as an interview from FOPL board members on The View stimulated discussions about our sector within the Ministry. This has led to a fantastic level of engagement that we have



maintained throughout the year, with an open and frequent line of communication to MTCS policy advisors and staff.

The spring and summer are predominately dedicated to municipal stakeholder outreach and education. FOPL attends several municipal conferences throughout the year with the majority happening between May and August. I was able to attend the AMO (Association of Municipalities of Ontario), AMCTO (Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks, and Treasurers of Ontario), FONOM (Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities) and ROMA (Rural Ontario Municipal Association) Conferences in 2023. Each conference has several hundred if not thousands of delegates attend and with a booth in the tradeshow, we are able to have conversations with municipal councilors, CAOs, mayors, clerks and treasurers from around the province. Conversations with delegates ranged from positive to neutral with many asking questions about library boards and the nuances of the Public Libraries Act. Many were curious about the overall trends and issues libraries in Ontario are seeing as of late and were generally supportive of our two main campaigns, “The Value of Public Libraries” and “Keeping Public Libraries Independent”. We had very valuable discussions about our Government Relations priorities and the impact the ODPL would have on their communities. This is a noticeable shift from the atmosphere last year when many delegates avoided our booth and were wary in speaking to us. The AMO Conference in August was a hugely positive experience and saw the same upward trend from when we attended last year. There were over 3000 delegates that attended this year and we spoke to everyone from local councilors and mayors to ministers and Marit Stiles. All were supportive of public libraries, our government relations priorities and wanted to know more about how they could support their own local public libraries. We heard from many who were facing challenging library board situations that are typical of the first year a board comes together. We heard repeatedly that their “library is so much more than books!” which really paved the way for conversations about enhancing PLOG funding and the Ontario Digital Public Library.

We also worked throughout the summer to reframe our government relations priorities and strategize our way ahead of the 2024 Ministry of Finance budget submission. We have refocused on asking for an additional \$25 million for the Public Libraries Operating Grant which would bring the current envelope of \$21 million up to today’s value. Feedback from the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport regarding earlier consultations from March had been positive and they showed keen interest in the idea of an Ontario Digital Public Library. We leveraged this interest and went forward into the next legislative session to embark on a determined advocacy campaign.



During the 2023 Ontario Public Library Week event, we were able to have a lengthy meeting with Minister Lumsden to talk about our provincial asks and what these would mean for public libraries across the province. The Minister was very interested in hearing about our libraries and what his ministry could do to support this important piece of social infrastructure. Minister Lumsden was well briefed on our provincial asks and came prepared with some insightful questions, paying particular interest in the Ontario Digital Public Library. With this new momentum, FOPL amped up our advocacy efforts into the fall legislative session. We began to aggressively pursue advocating for the ODPL, First Nations Salary Supplement increase and an increase in the Public Libraries Operating Grant (PLOG). FOPL and OLA engaged in a two-day advocacy event at Queen's Park where members met with a variety of stakeholders from all parties includes ministers, MPPs, and MTCS staff. We had a very impactful presence and overall, the advocacy effort was very positive and moved the needle over in the right direction. We had a very positive response from all NDP members that we met with, including Marit Stiles. Most were supportive but a few expressed their interest in taking supportive action, which is what we're looking for. During this advocacy event Minister Lumsden made it clear that we need to specifically get support from PC Caucus members. With our next steps clearly outlined, we quickly began an aggressive PC Caucus outreach campaign. We identified 70 PC MPPs that we didn't previously meet with during the advocacy days at Queen's Park and reached out to library CEOs local to those MPPs. We were able to meet with 32 MPPs in total, most of which said they would support our priorities. At the same time, through December and January of 2024, we started applying for deputations to the Standing Committee of Economic Affairs and Finance and coordinated library CEOs to make local deputations as well. We were able to secure 11 deputations and one presentation to the Minister of Finance, an outstanding level of engagement.

After a very successful fall and winter, we were able to secure funding for two different grant streams! This is an incredible accomplishment that could not have been done without the collective efforts of all who were involved. In mid-February of this year, Minister Lumsden announced a \$122,000 increase to the existing Internet Connectivity Grant! This new investment of funds will enable up to 155 of Ontario's more rural, northern and First Nations Public Libraries to be fully reimbursed for their connectivity costs under the Internet Connectivity Grant. This increase will provide the funding certainty these libraries need to maintain a crucial broadband lifeline for their communities. This exciting announcement was only the precursor of more to come. An additional investment of 1.25 million per year for a total of 3.75 million over three years will be allocated through the First Nations Salary Supplement and Provincial Libraries Operating Grant, an increase of almost 300% of what these libraries are currently receiving. While we do not have the details of this commitment as of yet, the MTCS has said that we can share this fantastic news with our



members and a formal, public news release will be forthcoming. I want to congratulate our board and members for your hard work in achieving this goal! Thank you for all the meetings, emails, phone calls, follow-ups, deputations, and presentations you have made to your MPPs and other stakeholders. The province has heard our provincial budget requests and delivered on our request to increase funding for First Nations Public Libraries by an additional (almost) 2 million annually.

I'm excited to continue our advocacy efforts and leverage this momentum into the 2024 fall advocacy season. We have made significant progress in our advocacy efforts, building relationships with government stakeholders, and engaging in strategic partnerships. Thank you to the Ontario library community and our members for your ongoing support of FOPL. Our efforts have a very real impact on creating a sustainable future for our public libraries. I am excited to see what we can accomplish next.

Kind Regards,

Dina Stevens, MLIS
Executive Director

Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
PO Box 3285
Meaford Stn Main, ON
N4L 1A5
Cell: 416-873-8139
Email: dinastevens@fopl.ca