

# Our Shared Stories:

Writing the Future of Toronto's Library

Toronto Public Library Strategic Plan | 2008 – 2011



## **Our Vision**

Toronto Public Library inspires the spirit of exploration, the joy of reading and the pursuit of knowledge for people of all ages and backgrounds, beginning with the very young.

As cornerstones of their neighbourhoods, our libraries connect people to each other, to their community, and to their hopes and dreams.

Our rich resources provide the opportunity for everyone to treasure the past and to create a future that is full of possibility.

The Library promotes and enriches the democratic, cultural, educational and economic life of our diverse and evolving city.

The public library is a catalyst for imagination, a conduit to information and the cornerstone of the local community. With the arrival of the digital age and the natural evolution of our wonderfully diverse city, the role of Toronto Public Library has continued to evolve. We support the joy of reading and discovery, which contribute to the economic and cultural life of the city.



**The Library promotes and enriches the democratic, cultural, educational and economic life of our diverse and evolving city.**

The Library enables greater opportunities at work and school for our residents, provides vital public space and ensures that all Toronto residents have access to books in all their forms, for all their needs.

You have told us that our collections and staff enrich, and even transform your lives. We're committed to providing the highest quality and most relevant library service we can, but we depend on your ongoing feedback. We are pleased to present our third Strategic Plan (2008 – 2011), *Our Shared Stories: Writing the Future of Toronto's Library*, created with your invaluable input, and forged with our determination to continue to help build our great city.

## **Library Board Strategic Planning Steering Committee**

Kathy Gallagher Ross  
Okeima Lawrence  
Eman Ahmed  
Matthew Church  
Ann Decter  
Tina Edan

## **1 The Next Four Years**

The Library promotes and enriches the democratic, cultural, educational and economic life of our diverse and evolving city.

## **4 Understanding the Changing City That We Serve**

To engage Toronto residents in this conversation, we reached out to the community and invited people into our branches to learn how we can continue to best meet your needs.

## **6 Engaging Toronto's Diverse Communities**

Toronto Public Library celebrates and supports diversity, and strives to reflect our shared values in everything we do.

## **8 Addressing the Growing Income Gap**

Toronto Public Library addresses the growing income gap between rich and poor by ensuring that all residents, regardless of age or income, have support in developing the literacy skills they need, and access to the information and knowledge they require.

## **10 Expanding Access to Technology and Online Services**

Toronto Public Library plays an important role in ensuring that all Toronto residents have access to up-to-date technology, the Internet and digital resources so critical to full participation in social, economic and community life.

## **12 Supporting Creativity and Culture**

Through our resources, programs, partnerships and spaces, the Library, as a catalyst for culture and creative expression, contributes to the vibrancy and livability of the city and its neighbourhoods.

## **14 Supporting a Sustainable Library**

Environmental sustainability is part of ensuring that the Toronto Public Library is a responsible corporate citizen. Sustainability also extends to our responsibility to advocate on behalf of the essential role of public libraries in our city and the greater community.

## **16 Our Ongoing Commitment to You**

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and helped to write our future in this strategic plan. You let us know the many ways the library contributes to your life and supports your goals.

## Understanding the Changing City That We Serve

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To begin the strategic planning process, we undertook extensive research about public libraries and the future of our city. We learned that in many ways Toronto is a model city for the twenty-first century with many strengths and challenges:

- Toronto is the economic engine of Canada, but the wealth is not shared equally, creating a growing income gap
- With a population that is 50% foreign-born, Toronto's population growth is driven by immigration
- The changing economic climate creates challenges for residents, especially the most vulnerable, and impacts the public funding on which the library depends
- The needs of older residents are complex and depend on their age, employment status and activity levels
- Culture in Toronto contributes to its residents' quality of life, prosperity and economic success, and so must be nurtured and supported
- Environmental sustainability will continue to impact how both individuals and organizations choose to live and work in this city

### **We Came to You with Our Questions**

To engage Toronto residents in this conversation, we reached out to the community, and invited people into our branches to learn how we can continue to best meet your needs.

Print materials and surveys were available in ten languages and in large print, both in our 99 branches and on the library website.

### **During the consultations, we heard a lot about the need to:**

1. maintain strong print, media and electronic collections
2. ensure that library branches are important community hubs, providing valued public space
3. provide support for vulnerable people
4. promote the virtual library and free Internet access in library branches
5. collaborate with other city agencies and community partners
6. increase awareness of library services
7. reduce physical, cultural and administrative barriers to library access
8. continue to support a relevant, innovative public library service for all Torontonians

North York Central Library public strategic planning session, one of several held in branches across the city in 2007.

For an in-depth look at the strategic planning process, visit our website at [torontopubliclibrary.ca/strategicplan](http://torontopubliclibrary.ca/strategicplan)



We heard from thousands of residents, city and cultural partners, and library staff. We held focus groups at branches across the city, but went beyond the library to learn from attendees at employment seminars, computer courses, book clubs, farmers' markets, seniors' groups (in seven languages!) and shelters. We talked to homeless youth, newcomers, people with disabilities, people living in priority neighbourhoods, children and caregivers, and early school leavers. We may even have spoken to you!

**To engage Toronto residents in this conversation, we reached out to the community as well as invited people into our branches to learn how we can continue to best meet your needs.**

*"TPL, its website and its services are among the finest I have seen, not only in Canada, but worldwide."*  
– Newcomer participating in branch consultation session

### **Choosing Priorities and Setting Direction**

The entire public consultation process was overseen by a committee of the Toronto Public Library Board, the Library Board Strategic Planning Steering Committee. This group assessed and discussed the input and feedback from all of the research and consultations, identified goals and priorities, and provided direction for the final plan which was then approved by the Library Board.

This process has resulted in a Strategic Plan that we hope is responsive to the needs of the city's residents and communities, and will help us fulfil our mission to provide the best possible collections, services and programs. Over the next four years, we will build on our legacy of being the largest, busiest and best-loved public library system in the world.



## Engaging Toronto's Diverse Communities

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Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world. We are also a city of shared values based on principles of equity and social justice. We support a common Canadian identity which also recognizes the vitality of our diverse communities.

**Toronto Public Library celebrates and supports diversity, and strives to reflect our shared values in everything we do.**

Toronto Public Library celebrates and supports diversity, and embraces shared values in everything we do. Our 99 branches and mobile library services provide community and cultural hubs for Toronto residents and our virtual library makes resources accessible in and beyond the city. Libraries provide a neutral space where people can participate in neighbourhood and city-wide initiatives, and collaborate on topics that matter to them. Through our collections, services and partnerships, Toronto Public Library provides support and resources to all age groups at all stages in their lives.

This public meeting on the racialization of crime and the development of an anti-racist response to guns and gangs was held at the Toronto Reference Library.



# FOCUS: **Engaging Toronto's Diverse Communities** In our city and our neighbourhoods

## Goals

- Encourage participation in city life
- Promote greater participation in library programs and services
- Support Toronto's children in developing early reading skills
- Support youth in their educational achievement as a foundation for success
- Engage our youth in ways that are meaningful to them, with emphasis on leadership skills and social integration
- Enhance older adults' quality of life and access to lifelong learning

## Actions

**These are just some of the ways we can reach our goals:**

- Offer resources and programs to engage and encourage discussion in civic and social issues important to the city and our neighbourhoods
- Extend open hours on weekends and evenings to meet the diverse needs of children, families and students
- Build and promote collections to celebrate Toronto's history, culture and diversity and to promote cross-cultural understanding
- Through our *Ready for Reading* early literacy program, promote the importance of early literacy and support caregivers in developing these skills in children
- Expand access to high quality out-of-school-time and summer programs for children and youth to build leadership, academic and social skills
- Provide increased support for newcomer youth in partnership with other agencies
- Address the needs of older adults – those in the workforce, active retirees, and frail persons – with a focus on culture, community and lifelong learning
- Support newcomers with social integration, and educational and economic achievement

*"Everything about Toronto Library is important to me. It amazes me when I find out someone I know doesn't have a library card.*

*We have this wonderful resource at our fingertips which is so convenient...*

*The library was a major part of growing up in my family and I am continuing that tradition with my own two children...."*

Adult library user at in-branch consultation



## Addressing the Growing Income Gap

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Research confirms there is a growing income gap in Toronto, and the number of people living on low incomes is increasing. Individual and community prosperity has a major impact on community strength. Literacy and education levels play a significant role in determining prosperity and employment opportunities.

**Toronto Public Library addresses the growing income gap between rich and poor by ensuring that all residents, regardless of age or income, have support in developing the literacy skills they need, and access to the information and knowledge they require.**

Some newcomers find it difficult to get jobs in their fields because of multiple barriers, including lack of Canadian job experience, foreign credential recognition and education. Persons with disabilities also face significant barriers.

Every day, Toronto Public Library makes significant contributions to the economic prosperity of this city, helping to build a skilled workforce and literate population. Everyone who lives, works or studies in Toronto can use our free resources and programs to improve their reading and writing skills; get assistance with their earning and employment goals; and learn about other employment supports.

Photo: City of Toronto



# FOCUS: Addressing the Growing Income Gap

Towards a city of opportunity shared by all

## Goals

- Address the needs of vulnerable individuals and neighbourhoods, working in partnership with others
- Focus on supporting literacy and educational goals for adults

## Actions

These are just some of the ways we can reach our goals:

- Expand open hours in branches across the city, providing safe community destinations
- Address barriers to library usage including fines and fees
- Strengthen literacy and employment-related programs and services to address the needs of ESL learners, early school leavers, adult learners and job seekers
- Promote access to volunteer opportunities as pre-employment experience
- Strengthen and extend our partnerships with local agencies to reach newcomers and to better serve their needs
- Be a strong local partner by supporting neighbourhood networks, projects and events, and by providing access to library space for community activities

*“Continue with this program so that others like myself can keep on learning and improving and get a better job at the end.”*

– Participant in the Library’s Adult Literacy Program

## Expanding Access to Technology and Online Services

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The Internet has become a major source of information and connects people and communities worldwide. Technology also provides new opportunities to deliver services in more efficient and personalized ways.

Access to this technology and digital information is essential to full participation in Canada's social, economic and community life, and the Toronto Public Library has an important role in providing that access freely, universally and equitably. An outstanding virtual library allows customers to not only access their records and place holds online, but also to access our special collections; download books,

**Toronto Public Library plays an important role in ensuring that all Toronto residents have access to up-to-date technology, the Internet and digital resources so crucial to full participation in social, economic and community life.**

While this Web Basics session at Toronto Reference Library was open to everyone, the Library also provides free targeted training to seniors, job seekers and other groups.

music and videos; ask reference questions; participate in online communities such as book clubs; and provide user-generated content such as book reviews. Computers, wireless, high speed Internet and training services in our branches enable individual and collaborative learning and economic opportunities.



# FOCUS: Expanding Access to Technology and Online Services

## Our Lives in Digital Times

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### Goals

- Create an outstanding virtual library
- Ensure access to technology for all
- Build virtual content

### Actions

These are just some of the ways we can reach our goals:

- Expand access to technology in library branches including laptops, wireless and collaborative learning spaces
- Offer more content online including downloadable books, videos and music, and other digital media
- Make available library content from the website through the digitization of our special collections, podcasts of library events and user-generated content
- Improve customer service through in-branch and online self-service technologies, including registration, fine payment and self-serve checkout
- Use technology to engage communities in library services and programs – through social networking sites, in-branch gaming, and with other emerging technologies

*“The ability to put holds on books online, and the ability to know when they are ready or books are overdue online is amazing!!!”*

– Arts consultation participant

Search for a book, place holds online or use one of the Library’s databases – as close as your laptop or your cellphone.





## Supporting Creativity and Culture

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The livability of a city is enhanced by the vibrancy of its cultural life. Cultural activities express individual hopes and dreams and help communities define themselves. Access to culture encourages discovery, stimulates the imagination and builds community. A vibrant cultural sector supports the economic prosperity of the city.

**Through our resources, programs, partnerships and spaces, the Library, as a catalyst for culture and creative expression, contributes to the vibrancy and livability of the city and its neighbourhoods.**

Our collections provide access to an extensive range of cultural expressions – everything from a new online video to a history of theatre in Toronto. Our branches provide free access to a wealth of cultural programs, and our theatres and community spaces provide performers and artists with a local place to share their work. We promote participation in cultural activity and encourage discussion.

Toronto Reference Library hosts a wide range of presentations, panels and literary events, including this Literary Café featuring Ralph Benmergui, Jan Wong and Christie Blatchford.



# FOCUS: **Supporting Creativity and Culture**

**Participation and access at the city and neighbourhood level**

## Goals

- Support city-wide and local cultural expression
- Build the Library's role in providing original and accessible cultural programming

## Actions

**These are just some of the ways we can reach our goals:**

- Partner in city cultural festivals including Luminato, Nuit Blanche, Toronto Book Awards and LitCity
- Enable our libraries to be venues for accessible cultural, literary and arts events, and cultural hubs to local artists, authors and performers
- Continue to build special collections that reflect Toronto's rich cultural heritage, and to enhance promotion of, and access to these collections through the website, the TD Gallery and other display opportunities
- Create a comprehensive strategy to market library collections including popular and contemporary materials online and in branches
- Promote access to other city cultural venues through programs delivered in partnership
- Build community memory through the acquisition and preservation of the community's printed, recorded and digital records

*"I use TPL daily as a mother, artist, art teacher and avid reader and I think the system is great and getting better all the time. The fact that you are surveying your users is even better! Thank you for doing that!"*  
– Arts consultation participant

## Supporting a Sustainable Library

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Sustainability is a hallmark of responsible organizations in the twenty-first century. Toronto Public Library actively supports environmental sustainability through practices that reduce the Library's current and future impact on the environment. The Library also needs to promote greater resident participation in discussions about the environment and sustainable practices as part of our overall responsibilities as a public service provider.

**Environmental sustainability is part of ensuring that the Toronto Public Library is a responsible corporate citizen. Sustainability also extends to our responsibility to advocate on behalf of the essential role of public libraries in our city and the greater community.**

In addition, sustainability extends to our responsibility to advocate for the essential role of public libraries in the community. Delivery of high quality library services today and in the future depends on sustainable infrastructure, and financial and staff resources.

The renovation of Runnymede Branch maintained its historical beauty, while adding space and modern day conveniences.





# FOCUS: **Supporting a Sustainable Library** Protecting our resources and our future

## Goals

- Promote environmentally sustainable practices
- Engage in leadership and advocacy for the essential role of the public library in the community
- Ensure sustainability of the budget, staff resources and infrastructure

## Actions

### These are just some of the ways we can reach our goals:

- Contribute to the city's green agenda by providing public education programming and collections focused on environmental issues and best practices
- Develop a comprehensive green strategy for the Library focusing on buildings and systems, energy consumption, waste diversion, reduction and recycling
- Advocate for strong public funding to support the Library's essential role in creating strong neighbourhoods and a successful city
- Extend and enhance library services in partnership with the Toronto Public Library Foundation
- Develop the diversity and expertise of library staff to ensure the delivery of world-class library service now and in the future
- Strengthen the Library's staff training and development program to emphasize areas of innovation including community development, supporting partnerships, and building and contributing to online communities
- Achieve excellence in library architecture and interior design while working within environmental standards

*"The Public Library is the greatest asset we have, so much for free, there is nothing else like it."*

– Kennedy/Eglinton  
Expansion  
focus group

Staff at newly renovated Woodside Square Branch help customers at checkout.

## Our Ongoing Commitment to You From the Toronto Public Library Board

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### Toronto Public Library Board

Kathy Gallagher Ross, Chair  
Okeima Lawrence, Vice-Chair  
Councillor Paul Ainslie  
Eman Ahmed  
Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler  
Matthew Church  
Councillor Janet Davis  
Ann Decter  
Tina Edan  
Councillor Chin Lee  
Councillor Anthony Perruzza  
Councillor Adam Vaughan  
Kate Wilson

Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and helped to write our future in this strategic plan. You let us know the many ways the Library contributes to your life and supports your goals

**You let us know the many ways the Library contributes to your life and supports your goals.**

*“Continue to be creative around how you deliver library programs so that people feel comfortable accessing service.”*

– Scarborough Village  
Neighbourhood  
Action Team

### To achieve the goals we've outlined here, the Library will:

- Communicate our strategic priorities to residents, stakeholders and Library staff to foster a broader understanding of the Library's role in Toronto
- Use the strategic plan as a framework for developing capital and operating budgets and city and community partnerships
- Report annually to the Library Board and the public on progress toward our goals
- Encourage an ongoing conversation with Library staff, stakeholders, residents and library users about how we can achieve our goals and improve our service with available resources

For more information, ongoing updates, and to provide your comments, visit the Toronto Public Library website at [torontopubliclibrary.ca/strategicplan](http://torontopubliclibrary.ca/strategicplan).

### **What you told us...**

"Knowledgeable librarians make a world of difference when visiting the library with a small child. I value the assistance we receive... Programs for children are vital in enhancing communication and pre-reading skills."

"The reading buddy program has been really important to my son. He has improved a lot since starting the program."

"I have found amazing friends in the YAG (Youth Advisory Group). The YAG has changed my life."

"English language classes and computer classes may help our community for future life."

"Continue good work of welcoming people with special needs into the library and encouraging them to use facilities."

"I don't think I can ever stop coming here because I find it so useful [for studies]."

"Surfing Seniors [a library program that teaches seniors how to use the Internet] at Toronto Reference Library is great!"

"Volunteer work [with the library] is one way to work with people who are newly retired who want to give back to their community and not necessarily go back to full-time work."

"Homeless and recently-housed people need literacy skills, basic skills programming. They are socially isolated, they need basic information skills, access to technology and they need somewhere warm."

"Through library services we read a variety of books. We learn ESL English. We learn keyboarding and obtain many more benefits."

"The Adult Literacy Program and the Leading to Reading Program are critical – if we want to keep literacy a priority in our community."

"I like the idea of an online book club and I like reading people's comments about the books. It gets me to think more about the book after I'm finished with it and I often learn something new."

Older adults use library computers to read the news, keep in touch with friends and family, and do their banking.

