

Toronto Public Library 2011 Operating Budget Update – Budget Committee

Integrate Periodicals at Toronto Reference Library

As part of the ongoing planning for the revitalization of the Toronto Reference Library, staff reviewed ways to improve the customer experience. It was determined that reintegrating the periodicals collection into the new subject departments would substantially improve customer service as a result of increased user convenience and more comprehensive reference service in subject areas. With enhanced staff knowledge of both print and electronic resources in their subject area, public awareness and use of these valuable information resources is expected to increase.

The Toronto Reference Library service structure is based on subject divided departments. Integrating the periodical collection into the appropriate subject departments will group all information resources on a topic together regardless of the format. This will make it easier for people to conduct comprehensive research and to access collections that are relevant to their research interests. Customers will be able to visit one department to find books, periodicals, directories, and electronic information on a subject.

Many periodicals are now available in both electronic format and specialized databases that deal with particular subject areas. The Periodicals Department librarians who work regularly with print and electronic periodical collections become accomplished in assisting customers with these electronic resources. With the integration of periodicals in the subject departments, subject librarians will develop increased awareness and knowledge of the periodicals and databases in their area of collection responsibility. Customers will be better served by staff that will have a more comprehensive understanding of the complete range of information sources on a given topic.

The proposed integration also addresses the significant changes that are occurring in the print journal publishing industry. Most periodical titles are now available in both electronic and print format. Because of the convenience of electronic access, particularly for back issues, the use of print copies has diminished. In addition, the cost of print periodicals is escalating beyond the rate of inflation, causing significant pressure on the library materials budget. The number of print periodicals has been decreasing as more cease publication each year. The Library has responded to these trends by reducing its print periodical subscriptions. Since 2006, 803 periodical subscriptions out of a total of 3,723 titles have been cancelled or have ceased publication. This represents a 21.5% reduction in the number of active subscriptions over a four-year period. It is anticipated that these trends will escalate in the coming years reducing the viability and effectiveness of maintaining a separate information and retrieval desk for periodicals.

Currently, subject department librarians refer most inquiries for journal research to the Periodical department. With integration, this information service work will move to the various subject departments. In 2010, the Periodicals department managed approximately 22,000 reference requests. This represents 8.7% of the total reference

questions asked at all TRL information desks. Librarians from the Periodicals Department will be reassigned to each of the subject departments to support the movement of information services. Their knowledge will be shared with other subject department librarians, expanding staff awareness and expertise overall.

An additional staff impact of integration is the transfer of the periodical stacks retrieval function from the Periodical information desk to the centralized Stacks Retrieval desk. Currently public service assistants are available at the Periodical information desk 60 hours per week to retrieve back issues of periodicals from the basement stacks when they are requested by customers.

With the integration of the periodicals into the subject areas, Access Department staff will add responsibility for retrieving periodicals from the stacks to their book retrieval routines. In 2010, Access staff retrieved 36,543 books and Periodicals staff retrieved an estimated 11,475 periodicals. Periodical requests often involve multiple issues of a single title. Book retrievals from stacks have declined 32% in the past eight years. Historical information for periodical retrievals for the similar period is not available. However, the in-library use of print periodicals declined 18.5% from 2008 to 2010. Periodicals Department staff estimates that on average, they make six to eight trips to the stacks to retrieve periodicals per day – a significant decline over the past several years. The additional workload of six to eight periodical retrieval trips a day can be accommodated within the current staffing and activity levels at the centralized Stacks Retrieval desk without any impact on retrieval times.

The integration of periodicals at TRL achieves a number of customer service benefits and maximizes use of library resources: improved customer convenience, more comprehensive reference service, and greater public and staff awareness and use of print and electronic resources.

While service driven, the integration of periodicals does achieve staff efficiencies. With the elimination of an information service and specialized retrieval desk, eight full-time positions can be eliminated from the establishment: five public service assistants and three librarians. Four positions would be eliminated in 2011 and another four in 2012. The remaining six librarians would be reassigned to subject departments with the appropriate periodicals. The integration would take place in mid-2011 and would result in a savings of \$229,000 in 2011 and a further \$365,000 in 2012. The total savings would be \$594,000.