

Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy

Date:	May 12, 2008
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present the Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy for approval. The policy establishes the conditions and context which support the distribution and posting of community information from individuals, community groups, agencies, institutions and government in Library branches. This report outlines the main features of the policy, including the types of materials which can be displayed and distributed in the Library.

The Library provides access to information about community activities and events and space to display materials in a variety of formats, including bulk publications (e.g., community newspapers and magazines, cultural brochures, continuing and full-time education calendars). Displaying and distributing information for the public supports the Library in fulfilling its mission of providing residents with opportunities for full participation in the life of their community.

Annually, Toronto Public Library receives more requests to display and distribute materials in its branches than can be accommodated. The policy enhances transparency and accountability by providing guidance on materials acceptable for display and distribution and introduces an appeals process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. Approves the Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy (Attachment 1).

Implementation Points

The Library will make the policy available to the public by posting it on the Library's website.

The Library will also develop procedures and training to guide staff in responding to requests to post/distribute materials and bulk publications.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial implications beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

The Library does not currently have a Board-approved policy addressing the display and distribution of materials from the public. Current approaches to managing requests and approvals for display and distribution of information have been guided by administrative practices. A Board-approved policy enhances transparency and accountability and the public's understanding of materials acceptable for display and distribution in the Library.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Annually, the Library receives a high volume of requests from the public to display or distribute information in branches. Requests to display materials are made locally at branches and centrally to Marketing and Communications for all materials requested to be posted at multiple branches. Examples of materials the Library currently displays and distributes include: employment and job search information, training and education, children's camp and daycare information, volunteer recruitment, etc.

In developing this policy, we considered existing practices, input from Library staff and a review of other library policies, procedures and guidelines. Common policy elements from the review incorporated into the proposed policy include:

- priority for display of Library and Library Foundation materials;
- no display or distribution of material that violates the Human Rights Code, municipal, provincial or federal law, or Library policies and procedures;
- no endorsement or support of the aims or objectives of groups whose materials are posted in the Library;
- no display of personal notices/advertising (i.e., for rent, pets, garage sales);
- appeals process.

COMMENTS

Summary of Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy

The objective of the Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy is to establish the conditions and context within which the Toronto Public Library supports the distribution and posting of community information from individuals, community groups, agencies, institutions and government.

The policy supports the Library's mission, by providing residents with information to enable full participation in the life of their community. In fulfilling this service role, the Library strives to create a welcoming environment for everyone. The Library provides access to information about community activities and events and space to display materials in a variety of formats, including bulk publications (e.g., community newspapers and magazines, cultural brochures, continuing and full-time education calendars).

Materials acceptable and unacceptable for display in the Library are outlined below.

Materials Acceptable for Display and Distribution

In addition to Toronto Public Library and Toronto Public Library Foundation materials and depending on the availability of space, the Library will also display or distribute materials:

- produced by or about the City of Toronto, its agencies, boards and commissions (e.g., Parks, Forestry and Recreation FUN Guide);
- about statutory programs related to public safety and education (e.g., seat belt safety, fire safety);
- regarding meetings, activities, events and volunteer information in the area;
- of educational, recreational and informational content;
- about cultural events including music, film, art, theatre, festivals and celebrations;
- in languages other than English. Additional information in English about the sponsor or the event may be required.

Because of the high volume of requests to display and distribute materials received and the amount of available space, there may be instances where it is not possible to display or distribute all materials that are acceptable under this policy. It is important to ensure that Library branches remain uncluttered, and information is organized in order to provide easier access to the public.

Materials Not Acceptable for Display and Distribution

The Library will not display or distribute:

- materials that contravene the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, federal or provincial laws and regulations, municipal by-laws and/or Toronto Public Library policies and procedures;

- materials whose primary focus and/or editorial policy is partisan or political in nature and communications from political representatives. However, political materials may be eligible when they announce community meetings or forums for discussion of community issues;
- faith-based materials whose primary purpose and/or editorial policy is promoting faith;
- materials that are primarily devoted to the sale, advertising, solicitation, or promotion of commercial products or services;
- personal ads and notices and notices of items for sale or rent;
- materials in unsuitable formats (e.g. tear-offs or oversize materials);
- materials that invite participation in medical research, including trials or testing;
- contests, surveys and pledge forms;
- fundraising with the exception of Toronto Public Library Foundation or local community-based materials;
- petitions.

Generally, the policy does not allow for fundraising materials in the Library with the exception of materials from Toronto Public Library Foundation or the local community. Based on historical practice, the sale of poppies in Library branches is permitted. The former library boards made a decision to permit the sale of poppies as an exception to the general rule of not allowing fundraising. The sale of poppies recognizes national observance of Remembrance Day and the contribution of Canada's war veterans. It is recommended that the sale of poppies continue as an exception.

The policy recommends that petitions not be displayed and distributed in the Library. The Library supports the principle of Intellectual Freedom and offers a range of information and opinions creating neutral public space. Petitions often recommend or endorse a single course of action or point of view. Allowing petitions in the Library may imply endorsement and conflict with the Library's role as a neutral information provider.

Appeals Process

The policy provides for an appeals process for written challenges where the Library has decided not to post or distribute material. The City Librarian is responsible for receiving all appeals in writing and notifying appellants of the decision in writing.

Accountabilities

Branch staff are responsible for approving local requests to post/distribute materials and bulk publications for their branch. All requests to post/distribute materials for more than one location or system-wide will be coordinated and approved centrally by Marketing and Communications.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Displaying and Distributing Information for the Public Policy