

Art Exhibits Program Fees

Date:	October 20, 2014
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	Acting City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the art exhibit fee pilot program which began in September 2013. An exhibit fee of \$20 a month was instituted at the beginning of the pilot. Previously, no fee had been charged. During the 2013/2014 art exhibit season, the fee generated \$2,800 in revenues. Projected revenue for 2014/2015 is approximately \$2,300. The reduction is a result of the decrease in the number of artist applications.

Because the reasons for the decline are not clear-cut and because it is unknown whether the trend will continue, it is recommended that the pilot be extended for the 2015/16 art exhibit season, with additional promotion of the program being undertaken. The number of applicants will be assessed in the spring of 2015 when the juried process is complete, and a further recommendation about art exhibit fees will be made to the Toronto Public Library Board at that time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. extends the art exhibit fee pilot for the 2015/16 season with additional promotion of the program being undertaken; and
2. requests staff to report back to the Board in spring 2015 with a final recommendation about the art exhibit fee.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

During the 2013/2014 art exhibit season, the fee generated \$2,800 in revenues. Projected revenue for 2014/2015 is approximately \$2,300. The reduction is a result of the decrease in the number of artist applications.

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

DECISION HISTORY

The Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits Policy was adopted at the Toronto Public Library Board's May 14, 2007 meeting. The policy was implemented in 2009. At its May 28, 2012 meeting, the Library Board requested that staff pilot a program to charge an exhibition fee of \$20 a month beginning in 2013 for one year and report back to the Board regarding the program.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Toronto Public Library's Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits Policy states that "the Library is pleased to provide free space for art exhibits which reflect the diverse cultural interests of the City and its neighbourhoods, and which foster community and individual expression." The Library's 2012 - 2015 Strategic Plan includes the priority area "Create" and a goal focussing on "promoting and providing pathways to Toronto's culture through resources, services and programming." Providing space for local community artists to display their work provides visitors with an opportunity to engage in the creative life of their community, and presents community artists, including youth, with a valued place to exhibit their art locally.

Exhibitors include individual artists, artists' collectives, students at local schools, and artists sponsored by community agencies, for example, newcomer artists or artists with disabilities. Art is selected for exhibit by an annual jury comprised of community artists and Library staff.

Artists exhibiting at the Library are required to set up and take down their shows by themselves. Shows are promoted on the website and in What's On, but any flyers, posters and press releases must be handled by the artist. Library staff does not provide support for sales. If artists wish to hold a launch, they must pay to rent space at the Library as well as providing refreshments and promoting the event.

Not all Library branches have suitable space for art exhibits. In many cases there is not enough bare wall space available in a visible location.

COMMENTS

Pilot Evaluation

Each year the art exhibit season runs from September to August, with the art selection jury sitting in the early spring. The art exhibit fee pilot took place in the 2013/14 season. The fee is continuing into the 2014/15 season to allow staff more time to fully assess the impact of the new fee.

A total of 194 artists applied for the 2013/14 season, which was an average amount. Roughly 200 artists per year have applied since the program's inception in 2009. In 2014/15 there was a marked decline in the number of applicants, with only 137 applications; a decrease of 30%.

Currently 14 branches regularly provide space for art exhibits. Other branches occasionally host smaller exhibits on an ad hoc basis. It is anticipated that approximately 115 paid exhibits will be held in 2014/15, generating approximately \$2,300 of revenue. Libraries do also host some unpaid exhibits, primarily children's art from local schools.

The reasons for the decline in applicants in 2014/15 are not clear-cut. The introduction of the fee may have had a delayed impact. In the 2013 survey of participating artists, the artists indicated that while they value exhibit space at the Library, they feel that the quality of the space and the level of service provided do not justify an exhibit fee. As well, the fee represents a barrier to many artists who are unable to afford the fee on top of the significant costs of art materials and framing.

Another factor may have been the disruptions to the art exhibit spaces in 2013/14. Unusual weather occurrences leading to flooding and construction delays impacted several of the art exhibit spaces, resulting in last minute scheduling changes. This may have decreased interest in returning to exhibit at the Library.

Promotion of the art exhibits program to artists has been consistent over the last few years. Invitations to apply have been emailed to arts organizations and past exhibitors and the program has been advertised with flyers in Library branches, on the website and through social media.

The cost of administering the fee on an ongoing basis is minimal. Payments are accepted in the branch at the time the exhibits are installed.

CONCLUSION

The art exhibit fee pilot is generating between \$2,000 and \$3,000 of revenue each year. However, the number of artists applying to exhibit dropped by 30% in the second year of the pilot, raising concerns about the ongoing viability of the program. Because the reasons for the decline are not clear-cut and because it is unknown whether the trend will continue, it is recommended that the pilot be extended for the 2015/16 art exhibit season, with additional promotion of the program being undertaken. The number of applicants will be assessed in the spring of 2015 when the juried process is completed, and a recommendation regarding the art exhibit fee will be made to the Board at that time. If a permanent fee is proposed, an amendment to the Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits Policy will be required.

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SIGNATURE

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