

Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

c/o North York Central Library
5120 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
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July 12, 2005

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Culture
Whitney Block, Room 4320
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1W3

Dear Minister Meilleur:

I am writing on behalf of the Governing Board and members of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (Federation) in response to your recently announced funding reductions to the Ontario Library Service (OLS) and to the Ministry's Connectivity and Strategic Development Funds.

As centres of life-long learning and cultural development, public libraries support community and economic development, cultural identity and quality of life across Ontario. The Ministry of Culture, through the Public Libraries Act, and by funding new initiatives, has a crucial role in fostering collaboration and the strategic development of new concepts and services in public libraries to better meet the needs of Ontario residents.

We thank you for your decision to maintain the per household grants at the current level, an important funding source for Ontario's public libraries. This financial support for the direct delivery of local library service, demonstrates continued Provincial commitment to local governments.

We recognize the government's financial constraints; however, any reduction in funding to library services is regrettable. As a result of the Ministry's recently announced funding reductions, the Federation Board determined that it would gather data to identify the public library's priority services so as to provide a considered and informed response to the Minister. The Federation issued a survey to the public libraries, asking them to indicate in priority order, the three OLS services that are of most value to their communities. Also in the questionnaire, libraries indicated the number of applications and the success of those applications in securing funding from the 'Connectivity' and 'Strategic Development' funding over a five year period.

Survey Results

Public library leaders, the Board Chairs and Chief Executive Officers, responded quickly and positively to the survey, despite the onset of the summer holiday season with:

- 54% of members of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries responding; and
- 41% of public libraries across Ontario responding, with 64% of those respondents serving populations of 30,000 or fewer.

The responding libraries identified the following OLS services and programs as those of most value to their communities.

- **#1 Priority Service: Interlibrary Loans**
Identified as the number one priority service by 65% of all respondents, and identified as one of three top priority services by 90% of all respondents;
- **#2 Priority Service: Courier Services**
identified as the number two priority service by 38% of all respondents, and identified as one of three top priority services by 62% of all respondents.

Clearly, the services of greatest priority to public libraries are the timely delivery of information and resources to the people of Ontario, irrespective of geographic location.

- **#3 Priority Service: Training programs for library staff**
Identified as the number three priority service by 26% of all respondents, and identified as one of the top three services by 41% of all respondents.

In addition to the top three priority service responses, **Information, Advice and Planning Assistance**, including programs specifically for small libraries, was identified by 36% of all respondents as one of their top three services. Of note, 50% of all respondents serving populations of less than 30,000 identified this service as one of the top three services.

This finding underscores the importance of the OLS' role as the provincially funded management layer supporting small public libraries in Ontario.

84% of responding libraries receiving **Library Connectivity Funding** serve small populations of 30,000 or less. Such funding is critical to the implementation of public internet access and delivery of important electronic information sources, especially in small and rural communities.

83% of responding libraries receiving **Library Strategic Development Fund (LSDF)** serve large populations of 30,000 or greater. The LSDF provides significant, important funds to public libraries for strategic development of new and innovative services, as these libraries operate in an environment of rapid technological, social and economic change while experiencing constrained local funding. When used as seed money, the LSDF funds leverage other public and private sector funds.

The Federation shares your commitment to ensure that all of Ontario's public libraries are positioned to support strong economic, educational and cultural development within our communities. It is imperative that any changes to funding not adversely affect the priority services identified by our libraries. Continued provincial funding for public libraries at current or increased levels is crucial to ensuring that Ontario residents of all ages have access to the information they need for success in Canada's information-based economy, regardless of where they live

Further to this brief summary, the Federation Executive and I request a meeting with you to review the other survey findings regarding public library priorities for provincial funding support. The Ministry of Culture is the champion of Ontario's public libraries and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jane Horrocks, Chair
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries Board

cc. Ministry of Culture, Libraries Branch; SOLS; OLS-N.