

**Art Exhibits Program Fees**

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| <b>Date:</b> | May 28, 2012                 |
| <b>To:</b>   | Toronto Public Library Board |
| <b>From:</b> | City Librarian               |

**SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to respond to the Toronto Public Library Board's request for a plan to charge a nominal fee to artists who participate in the Art Exhibits program. To review opportunities for charging a fee, the Library undertook a public consultation and an environmental scan. The results of the artist consultation indicate that while exhibit space in the Library is valued, approximately half of the respondents would be unwilling to pay to participate in the Art Exhibits Program. The environmental scan shows that TPL does not offer the level of service or quality of art exhibit space as galleries that charge for exhibitions.

Potential revenues are estimated to be \$2,500 per year. The modest amount of revenue generated does not merit the additional administrative effort, the reduced opportunities for community artists, or the loss of community artwork in the branches.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:**

1. continues to offer art exhibit space free of charge in accordance with the Library's Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits Policy.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There is no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

**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 December 12, 2011 meeting the Library Board requested that the City Librarian report

back to the Board in the new year with a plan to charge a nominal fee to artists who participate in the Art Exhibits program.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The Toronto Public Library's 2008 - 2011 strategic plan focused on supporting creativity and culture at the city and neighbourhood level. Providing free 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.

Currently 18 branches regularly provide space for art exhibits. Other branches occasionally host smaller exhibits on an ad hoc basis. Overall, approximately 230 month-long exhibits are held each year. 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 as well as in partnership with local arts organizations, for example, the Scarborough Arts Council.

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

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. 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. Library staff does not provide support for sales. Artists exhibiting at the Library report that they sell very little art.

## **COMMENTS**

To review opportunities for charging a nominal fee for art exhibitions, the Library undertook several activities. Public consultation was conducted through an online survey for artists. An environmental scan of small public galleries was completed, including exhibit space located in public libraries.

### **Public Consultation**

In February 2012, an online survey was sent to 541 artists who had submitted applications to the Art Exhibits program in the past. The Library received 130 responses, a response rate of 24%. The majority of artists identified themselves as emerging artists. Roughly half of the artists indicated that they would be unwilling to pay to participate in the Art Exhibit Program if there is a fee. Of those willing to pay, an exhibition fee of \$20/month was preferred. A summary of the results of the survey can be found in Attachment 1.

A number of themes emerged from the comments made by the artists. Many expressed gratitude for the program:

- “It’s the only opportunity many new artists will have to exhibit their work.”
- “An excellent programme.”
- “I’m very thankful for the opportunity to exhibit at the Library.”
- “It is a beautiful initiative that targets emerging artists in Toronto.”

A number expressed concerns about the quality of the exhibit spaces at the Library, which reduces their willingness to pay:

- “It is wonderful that the Toronto Libraries now have art spaces, however most of them tend to be out of the way, or in awkward spaces. As the Library’s first priority is to be a library, this is understandable, but I think when you start charging people for the use of space to display their work, you need to make sure the spaces are visible to higher traffic areas, well maintained and worthwhile to the artists, otherwise they might as well spend their money on gallery space where their art is guaranteed to be seen.”
- “For payment, the Library should consider sites which exhibit art shows in open areas, not in rooms hidden away.”
- “There is little chance of selling at the Library, many branches have inadequate display space.”

For many emerging artists, the fee would be prohibitive:

- “I’m finding it harder and harder to find free shows to enter and as an emerging artist with three part-time jobs, I don’t have a lot of money to send out for application fees.”
- “I do not make a living with my art. I would not be able to afford it.”
- “Artists are not wealthy. Art supplies are also quite expensive.”

Others are willing to pay:

- “I don’t mind paying. I consider it a privilege to show my art in your buildings.”

And finally, many artists noted that they sell very little of their art as a result of exhibiting at the Library and that the benefit is primarily to the Library.

## **Environmental Scan**

An environmental scan of public institutions with gallery space was conducted in February of 2012 (Attachment 2). Toronto Public Library’s no fee policy is in line with the policies of several other public libraries offering exhibit space, including Markham, London and Hamilton. In Mississauga where a fee of \$100 per month is charged, the bookings are managed by the City and the space is infrequently booked.

Most of the small public galleries surveyed charge an exhibit fee of approximately \$100 month. However, these galleries offer artists a variety of services for their fee: dedicated art space; space for an opening reception and event support; gallery staff to curate shows and hang the artwork; assistance with sales; and promotion to a targeted audience through e-mails, printed invitations, catalogues and media releases. Toronto Public Library does not offer these services to artists, although they are regularly requested.

As part of the environmental scan, CARFAC (Canadian Artists Representation Le Front des Artistes Canadiens) guidelines for compensating artists were also reviewed. This is an arts organization that sets exhibition fees that are to be paid to artists for exhibiting their work in public spaces that are not primarily dedicated to the sale of art. Charging artists a fee to exhibit at Toronto Public Library may lead to a request from this organization for the Library to compensate the artists rather than charge them.

## **Summary**

Toronto Public Library's Art Exhibits Program presents community artists with a valued avenue for exhibiting their work locally. It enhances the Library as a cultural destination and enables Library visitors to participate in the cultural life of their community. Continuing to offer art exhibit space free of charge in accordance with the Library's current Use of Library Space for Art Exhibits Policy supports the continuation of a strong Art Exhibits Program.

Based on the results of the survey, the higher the fee is, the larger the number of artists who would be unwilling to exhibit at the Library. Even at the \$20/month level almost half the artists are unwilling to pay. While artists value exhibit space at the Library, they feel that the quality of the space and the level of service provided do not justify an exhibition 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. Overall, potential revenues are estimated to be \$2,500 per year. The modest amount of revenue generated would result in reduced opportunities for community artists and the loss of community artwork in Library branches. Charging a commission for art sold would also generate very little revenue, based on the small amount of art that is sold.

As well, the current process for handling art exhibits at the Library is very streamlined, entailing minimal overhead. Charging fees or commissions would add another level of administration, the cost of which would more than offset any revenue generated.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Jane Pyper  
City Librarian

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: TPL Art Exhibit Space – Consultation Survey  
Attachment 2: Gallery/Art Exhibit Space Environmental Scan