

Provincial Election: Advocacy Opportunity

Date:	April 25, 2022
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to request Toronto Public Library Board approval for Board members to participate in public library advocacy as part of the upcoming provincial election. This report recommends an advocacy approach and priorities for Board consideration.

The election is a critical opportunity for the library sector to capture the attention of political parties and candidates and to address the gaps that continue to confront Ontario's libraries and the people who use them. The Ontario Library Association (OLA) and Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) have created advocacy resources that outline the significant issues facing libraries across the province, which are referenced in this report.

The goal of these advocacy efforts is to support the delivery of public library service across Ontario. Public libraries provide critical access to important digital and in-person resources, mental health and well-being supports, as well as supporting local public health authorities and other social services in their pandemic response. Despite these essential supports, many people across the province are struggling and unable to access the local public library resources they need. A clear and unified approach to advocacy province-wide will be most effective.

OLA and FOPL have identified the following two advocacy opportunities:

- Sustainable funding for public libraries on reserves, working alongside First Nations public library leaders.
- The creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library.

TPL has identified a third advocacy opportunity:

- Increase investments in mental health and addiction crisis intervention services available to the community to address the urgent needs of urban public libraries in addressing safety and security issues.

The recommended advocacy approach complies with the Library Board's [Advocacy Policy](#), which promotes a proactive advocacy approach to legislation, policies and funding that advance TPL and the broader library sector while not supporting a particular party or candidate. It also complies with TPL's [Use of Library Resources During an Election Period Policy](#), which requires that information provided to one candidate or party will be provided to all candidates or parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. Approves participation in the provincial election campaign with Board members sending advocacy letters to all Toronto candidates representing all parties.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This report has no financial impact beyond what is included in the approved 2022 operating budget.

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

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

By supporting these province-wide advocacy efforts leading up to the provincial election this June, TPL is aligned with its strategic plan (2020-2024) *Vital to Toronto – Building Success, Resilience and Well Being for our City* by “providing the vital ingredients for a democratic society” (Strategic Priority #4) and “equipping staff with the knowledge and tools they need” (Strategic Priority #5).

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Advocacy to support the delivery of public library service puts public libraries across Ontario in a position to provide equitable service to their customers, including First Nations and groups and individuals who are impacted by the digital divide.

OLA and FOPL are recommending working alongside First Nations Public Library leaders to rapidly implement a sustainable funding model for public libraries on reserves to ensure that these important local hubs are fully-funded and viable. This includes increasing direct provincial funding support to sustainably fund library operations and ensure a living income for frontline library staff in these communities.

An Ontario Digital Public Library will provide critical e-learning support and fair access to modern, digital resources for all Ontario public libraries, leveraging the Province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a common core of high-quality e-learning & online resources and more e-books.

TPL has identified a third advocacy priority: Increase investments in mental health and addiction crisis intervention services available to the community to address the urgent needs of urban public libraries in addressing safety and security issues.

Toronto is a densely populated, complex urban environment where inequalities are growing; these inequalities have been amplified through the pandemic.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) and Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) libraries have created advocacy resources that outline the significant issues facing libraries across the province, which are referenced in this report. The election is a critical opportunity for the library sector to capture the attention of political parties and candidates and address the gaps that continue to confront Ontario's libraries and the people who use them.

COMMENTS

The upcoming provincial election presents an opportunity for the Board and individual members to advocate on behalf of TPL and Ontario libraries in a manner that aligns with TPL's strategic plan as well as broader library sector goals. A clear and unified approach to advocacy province-wide will be most effective.

The TPL Board may consider advocacy efforts such as writing a letter to provincial candidates from all parties, including an invitation to meet to discuss issues outlined in the letter. There are three key issues that advocacy outreach should cover:

- Rapid implementation of a sustainable funding model for public libraries on reserves to ensure that these important local hubs are fully funded and viable, working alongside First Nations Public Library leaders. This includes increasing

direct provincial funding support to sustainably fund library operations and ensure a living income for frontline library staff in these communities.

- Creation of an Ontario Digital Public Library to provide critical e-learning support and fair access to modern, digital resources for all Ontario public libraries, leveraging the Province's significant purchasing power to give all Ontarians access to a common core of high-quality e-learning & online resources and more e-books.
- Increase investments in mental health and addiction crisis intervention services available to the community to address the urgent needs of urban public libraries in addressing safety and security issues.

Toronto is a densely populated, complex urban environment where inequalities are growing; these inequalities have been amplified through the pandemic. TPL's role in addressing critical social issues has been increasing because social services are not always available, in part, due to insufficient funding for supports and assistance. Vulnerable people experiencing challenges such as mental health issues, addictions and homelessness come to the library as a last resort with nowhere else to go. Increased provincial social services funding to support these vulnerable populations would help address this complex urban reality that is impacting safety and security of staff and the public in some library locations.

The recommended advocacy approach complies with the Library Board's Advocacy Policy, which promotes a proactive advocacy approach to legislation, policies and funding that advance TPL and the broader library sector while not supporting a particular party or candidate. It also complies with TPL's Use of Library Resources During an Election Period Policy, which requires that information provided to one candidate or party will be provided to all candidates or parties.

Advocacy efforts should be conducted before the provincial election on June 2, 2022 and will be coordinated for the Board by staff, pending Board approval.

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SIGNATURE

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